DANGERS OF THE DAY

Monsignor John S. Canon Vaughan

BUW A DIGON

DANGERS OF THE DAY

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Dangers of the Day

BY

The Rt. Rev. John S. Vaughan

With an Introduction by
Mgr. Canon Moyes

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Laus Deo Semper!

INTRODUCTION

By Monsig. James Canon Moyes, D. D.

THE eight chapters of this book are as so many danger-signals pointing to the perils which surround us in the life of to-day. We shall act wisely if we profit by their warning, and take care not to be misled by the over-confident frame of mind by which we are sometimes silly enough to imagine that we can escape a danger simply by ignoring it.

There is, if I remember right, in the West of Ireland, a hunt, the members of which have for years ridden straight over a difficult country in the spirit of their characteristic motto, "Where there is no fear there is no danger." No doubt there is a measure of wisdom and truth in their gallant device, and all will appreciate the ideal of bravery which inspires it. The motto does not hold good in the spiritual life. There, on the contrary, it would be far more true to say that "Where there is no fear, there is every

danger." That is due to the fact that in the spiritual domain, a higher order of courage is required; and that which is needed is not the reckless courage which closes the eyes to the danger in our path, but the calm, open-eyed courage which realizes it; and, in doing so, knows how to measure and surmount it. It is not the feeling of fear, but the yielding to it, that makes the coward. Nor is it the mere absence of fear, but the subduing of it, which makes the brave man.

A certain writer describes how artillery mules, having brought their pieces into action, are often found to graze quietly on the turf, concerned only in whisking away the flies with their tails, while shot and shell are ploughing furrows in the ground all around them. The mule is not brave, but merely danger-blind. A man may be found who, without any motive to compensate the risk, will balance himself on the edge of a precipice, or pirouette upon the summit of a chimney-stack. The man is not brave: he is merely stupid.

In moments of self-examination, when the light is more fully turned on, we may discover that there is a fair measure of

mulishness and foolishness in the way in which we deal with temptations, or occasions, or habits of sin, or other sources of grave spiritual peril. We allow ourselves to become fretful over the flies which disturb our comfort, when danger of death and eternal destruction is terribly close to us. We walk on the brink of the precipice, and try to find a mock security in turning away our eyes, and in seeking to forget the depth of the abyss which yawns beneath us. Such forgetfulness in neither brave nor rational. Far from lessening, it adds to the risk that we are running. As we prayerfully read over the chapters of this book, may God shed upon its pages those graces of light in which we may see our own particular danger, and learn to be brave in avoiding it! For, in saving our souls, we need all the courage which looks the facts in the face, and, above all, the facts which endanger our salvation.

We have, each of us, only one soul to save, and only one short span of life in which to save it, and our weal for all eternity hangs upon our success. Let us but once enter inside the gates of our heavenly home, and we are safe with God,

and safe forever; and we shall have endless ages of happiness in which to enjoy our rapturous security. Between now and then, the passage is brief, and we can not afford to forget that it is beset with very real dangers. There are dangers, as the Holy Spirit reminds us (I. Peter, v, 8), from the side of the Evil One, whose triumph over a soul is never more clever and complete than when he beguiles it into denying his action or existence. There are dangers from within us, and from the sad poltroonery of our indolence or self-indulgence. There are dangers, subtle and insidious, from the reaction upon our souls of the spirit of the world around us. The world, that "can not receive Christ," is always with us. The multitude who live only or mostly for this world, and who in practice quietly put God in the second place whenever their interest or pleasure requires it, are neither silent nor uninfluential. They are at all times busy, either in pitiful excuse for themselves, or in seduction of others; breathing forth their corrupt "wisdom," which, as St. Paul told the most worldly-wise nation of his day (I. Cor., i, 25), is foolishness in

the eyes of God. In doing so they create a vitiated atmosphere of thought and feeling, which is both poisonous and relaxing to all who breathe it.

The true worldling is always a weakling, in the measure in which he capitulates to allurements which he has not the courage to forego. Men who have grown weary of the work of raising their lives to the level of their conscience, weaken and find a sort of self-justification in dragging down their conscience to the level of their lives. They are even proud of not being hypocrites at the very moment when they have shirked the struggle with temptation, and laid down their arms, and are using the veil of non-hypocrisy to cover their retreat from the fight, and their love of the ease of non-resistance. They may not—for, after all, they are men—reach the lowest stage of all spiritual meanness, which seeks to throw the blame upon God, because He gave them the free-will which is the very crown and sovereignty of their rational dignity, and the nature which they have been too selfish to control; but the voice of the world, the whispers of surrender, and of apologies for surrender, ever pro-

ceeding from wills that are yielding in the struggle and the stress, swell into a pitiable concert of cowardice, and become an element of danger and discouragement to all who are fighting the battle of the Lord.

Against all such dangers, whether within or without our strength, all-sufficing and invincible is Christ, who Himself fights and triumphs in our combats, whose luminous teaching we receive in His Church as voiced by His Vicar, and whose life we share in the Adorable Sacrament of the Altar. And in Christ, and through Him, we are already fellow-citizens of the blessed, and are heirs to the loving patronage, protection and prayers of the Mother of God and the angels and the saints. If, then, the dangers are great, the security is greater—the encircling arms of Christ in the power and strength and the solace and the gladness of the Church of God.

WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL
CLERGY HOUSE

DANGERS OF THE DAY.

I.

Our Environment.

The materials of human virtue are everywhere abundant, as the light of the sun: raw materials. O woe that they so seldom are elaborated and built into a result! that they lie yet unelaborated, and stagnant in the souls of widespread, dreary millions, fermenting, festering; and issue at last as energetic *vice* instead of strong, practical *virtue!—Thomas Carlyle. "Latter-Day Pamphlets," p. 55.*

HOW swiftly ebbs the tide of life's dark sea! Like racing waves, its months and weeks flow by, till soon our course is run. Yet few will pause to weigh and measure life's responsibilities, or to ask themselves the reason why God doles out to them His precious gifts of years and months and days. They scarcely seem to realize that these are talents with which we have to trade until He comes. We are not here to rest inactive and inert, still less to dissipate our time in mirth and idle rioting. No: we live that we may learn the lessons that life teaches, and school ourselves to conquer nature's fitful moods, to check unruly passions, and to control our rebellious appetites.

The world is a school; and we are pupils, either apt or slow to profit by its teaching. Some gather fast the fruits of Wisdom's tree; while many scarcely recognize their sterling worth, but pluck the poisoned berries from some upas tree instead. We, at least, will not be so foolish, but, ere earth's short day has sped, we will arouse ourselves, and open our ears to duty's call, and learn to tread the narrow path of self-denial that leads over stony ways, upward and onward, to Eternity's golden gates and Heaven's sapphire floor.

One thing is certain. If we are placed in this world, as God has said, expressly to be tested and tried, even as gold in the furnace's fiery flame, we can not expect a tame and smooth career, but rather one of struggle, strife and war, in which our virtues are put upon their trial, and all that is best in us is drawn forth and made to assert its power.

It is impossible to screen ourselves from every onslaught, nor can we plead neutrality and decline to draw our sword. To fold our arms and sit as idle spectators amidst a world of strife, is only to

invite disaster, and to fall ignominiously—perhaps mortally wounded—on the field of battle. "Man's life on earth is a warfare," says the Holy Spirit of God,—a warfare between right and wrong, good and evil, duty and inclination. Whosoever conquers not, must himself be conquered; who wins not, loses; who fights not, perishes. Then let us make ready and gird our armor on, and keep our weapons bright.

Though it is quite impossible to point out the numberless dangers that beset us on every side, and the endless pitfalls that threaten our safety day by day, we may, at least, call attention to some of the most general and seductive. To do so will be no uncertain gain; for an enemy that is recognized as such, and whose tactics are laid bare, is stripped of half his power to harm.

Let us, then, look around us and endeavor to discover some of the chief sources of spiritual danger. Most probably the first danger to reveal itself to the vigilant eye of the cautious observer will be our very environment. Our lot is cast in a non-Catholic country;

we are constantly moving among Protestants, Jews, agnostics, unbelievers. We frequent their assemblies; we share in their amusements; we visit their houses; we correspond and transact business with them; we interchange courtesies,—in fact, we live on terms of familiarity with all sorts and conditions of men, and are glad to number them among our friends, associates, and companions.

I am not saying that we are to blame for this, or that we are doing anything wrong in itself. Far from it; I am merely stating a simple fact. I am describing the nature of the social atmosphere in which we live and move and have our being. Then, in addition to the people of England and America, the press of those countries is also Protestant and heretical, where it is not actually infidel. The countless books and reviews, and the papers and magazines, and the ephemeral literature of all kinds that load our tables and fill our libraries and sitting-rooms, are, for the most part, decidedly non-Catholic in their tone and sentiment. Indeed, it were to be wished that they were never anything worse. But,

alas! much of our literature is not merely non-Catholic, but often violently and aggressively *anti* - Catholic, — the output of authors whose one ambition seems to be to vilify, calumniate, and misrepresent the spirit and doctrines of the Church.

And as we mix with the world and lead our daily life, we hear expressed and advanced, often with much skill, eloquence, and plausibility, opinions and theories which are not of God but of men, and often of evil-minded and wholly misguided men. They may sound clever and wise, but it is far too often that seductive cleverness and "wisdom of the world," which, as the Apostle is careful to warn us, is downright "folly in the eyes of God."

Thus we find that the whole moral and intellectual atmosphere in which we habitually dwell, and which we—though, it may be, quite unconsciously—draw in with every breath, is a vitiated atmosphere,—an atmosphere heavily charged with the poisonous exhalations and noxious vapors of every variety of heresy and infidelity, and erroneous opinion both old and new. What is the result?

Well! The result, unless we are careful, is sure to be detrimental to the purity and vivacity of our faith.

It is the teaching of scientific men that there is an inherent tendency on the part of every organism, and on the part of every living being, to adapt itself to its environment. A general law runs through nature, in virtue of which every creature capable of modification will, little by little, be influenced and affected by the medium in which it lives, and by the conditions of its surroundings. Thus, for example, fish and other aquatic creatures living in deep pools, at the bottom of dark caves, where the light of the sun never, or scarcely ever, penetrates, become influenced by the all-pervading gloom around them. They slowly adapt themselves to their unhappy condition, become gradually blind, and in a few generations are without any serviceable organs of sight. The darkness, amid which their lives are passed, robs them, at last, of even the power of seeing.

Now, the danger we have especially to guard against is just that of adapting ourselves too readily to our present

vitiated and irreligious environment. This evil tendency will exist in spite of us. As a tendency, we can not exclude it. But, since we possess free will, and are not acted on as irresponsive and irresponsible agents, we possess the power to resist and overcome this tendency, provided always that we recognize and are fully sensible both of its existence and of its danger.

We Catholics form but a small minority in the country: in England, scarcely one in twenty; and even in the United States, not more than one in a half dozen. As a consequence, we are running a risk, which will be greater or less according to our individual character and training, of sinking to the religious level of our surroundings. This process of deterioration may be noticed in many individuals. We note that little by little they grow lax in their religious life and practice, and less sensitive to the sinfulness of heresy. They become indulgent, even to the extent of compromising the Church herself; and seek, by very questionable means and very lax views, to win for themselves, among their Protestant friends, an easy reputation for broad-mindedness and liberality; and

soon cease altogether to entertain that healthy and hearty detestation of all heresy which has ever characterized the saints, who, while they loved the heretic, loathed and abominated his errors.* As a tendency, this disposition to minimize can hardly be eliminated; but the fact serves only to impress us more deeply with the conviction that our duty is to open our eyes to the danger, to struggle against it, and by care and watchfulness to counteract the effects of our surroundings upon the general trend of our thoughts and conduct.

Until we candidly admit to ourselves that it is a real danger, we shall never successfully fight against it. I will illustrate my contention by means of an example. We have all had experience of the silent yet ceaseless action that the moisture-laden atmosphere has upon certain metals.

Take a bright sharp blade of glittering steel, brilliantly polished and highly tempered. Expose it for a period to the air. In an incredibly short time its appearance

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* Pius X. has condemned that tolerance, taught and practised especially by the neocritical school, "which preaches a charity that is without faith, and which, while dealing very gently with unbelief, *opens, alas! to all the road to eternal ruin*." (Dec., 1904.)

becomes wholly changed. First it loses its peculiar gloss and lustre, then its polished surface grows dull and dim, and its keen edge blunted and jagged. Upon this there follows a further process of decay, and a chemical change takes place. Slowly but surely the rust settles upon it, and corrodes and eats away its very substance; so that at last one can scarcely recognize in the dark, rusty object, the once bright and beautiful blade. It is worth nothing but to be thrown away.

Well, in the spiritual order, something very similar to this happens to our souls, when exposed year after year to the corrosive and contaminating atmosphere of the world. We start out on our earthly pilgrimage with a spirit of great and unquestioning loyalty to the Church. We love and cherish and revere her as our spiritual mother; we listen with attention to her teaching; we respect her decisions and we seek her counsel. Our obedience is thorough, prompt, and hearty. In fact, we seem to hear Christ Himself speaking through her lips; and it never occurs to us to carp and criticise, or to call in question her prudence or her wisdom.

When we meet with others acting differently, we are not only surprised: we are shocked and distressed. Perhaps we even burn with a holy indignation.

But time wears on. We grow accustomed to such conduct; we think less of it; and, little by little, our righteous indignation cools or dies out altogether; for the world has been too much with us. We may not realize this all at once. But by and by, when some law or ecclesiastical regulation comes and touches us personally—interfering with our liberty, or checking or restraining our desires in some way,—we, too, begin to encourage and entertain doubts as to the authority of the Church to impose her laws upon us, and to claim our obedience.

We have set our heart, let us suppose, on marrying a Protestant. Now, the Church forbids such unions, though she may grant a dispensation. Nevertheless, she imposes her conditions. She demands a promise that all the children that may be born of such a union shall be baptized in the Catholic Church and brought up Catholics; and that the marriage ceremony shall be solemnized in a Catholic church,

and before a Catholic priest, and so forth. But our Protestant fiancé does not approve of this arrangement. He is strongly averse to it, and appeals to our generosity to release him from such conditions. We listen to him rather than to the Church. Principle goes down before expediency. We yield. The atmosphere of the world has been acting upon us. We forget our past protestations of loyalty and our loving obedience; for the rust of self-will has eaten into our very soul. With a toss of the head and a gesture of defiance, we drive off to the nearest Protestant church, or perhaps to the registrar's office, and get married there. The bells ring out a merry peal from the Protestant church tower. But—the angels weep!

To everyone who is sufficiently vain and worldly-minded to listen, the devil is ever artfully and cunningly repeating the self-same query that he once put to Eve, with such disastrous effect—viz.: "Why hath God commanded you that you should not eat of *every* tree of Paradise?" And woe to us if we hearken to his words! When God deigns to speak, whether it be with His own divine lips, as in the Holy Scriptures, or

through the voice of His infallible spouse, the Church, it is our clear duty to obey. What God's motives are, or what His precise purpose may be, it is not for us to inquire. It is quite enough to know on unimpeachable evidence, that it is God who is speaking and commanding.

But the Evil One is well aware of our pride and inborn conceit. His experience tells him that he has only to suggest an appeal from the decree itself to our own private judgment, in order that we should fall into the trap and be caught in his toils. Hence he is ever whispering into the ears of worldly men and women; and trying to shake their simple faith by asking: "Why has God commanded this observance? Why has He restricted your liberty? Why should you be asked to do this or that? Why does the Church pass such a law or formulate such a regulation?" We hearken to these inquiries the more readily because they flatter our pride, and because they arouse within us a sense of our own importance; and too often we answer the devil by expressing our readiness to determine the whole matter for ourselves. That we have never studied a theological

treatise in our lives, and that we know nothing of the real merits of the particular point at issue, matters not a straw. We are quite ready to set our individual opinion—formed, perhaps, in a fit of irritation and pique—against the solemn and calm judgment of the Pope and the whole College of Cardinals.

There is, in fact, a certain class of persons who seem to imagine that they have been especially appointed to instruct the Church, and to determine what is right and what is wrong. They pose as masters, not as disciples. They wish to govern and not to obey, to judge and not to be judged. Nothing that the Supreme Pontiff or his council does or decrees is right until it has received their sanction and approval. "They claim to be absolutely independent of the restraining influence and authority of Catholic theology; nay, more: they consider that the theology of the Church should be built upon the data which they furnish, and, abandoning the beaten paths of the past, follow the laws laid down by themselves." They have neither the wisdom to submit nor even the modesty to keep silence, but must needs

vent their superior knowledge in a loud, consequential and dictatorial manner, in the most hostile and anti-Catholic journals of the land; and will even invite the heretical press to assist them to improve the policy of the Holy See, to amend the decrees of Roman congregations, or to upset the ruling of their Ordinary. Though professing to be practical Catholics, they side with the enemies of the Church, judge her action on no higher principles than those that govern the world, and repeat as new and true, calumnies as old as, and oftener older than, Christianity itself. That we do not exaggerate is evident from the words of Pius X., and of Leo XIII. as well, who laments in burning sentences that "the license which is commonly confounded with liberty, the passion for criticising and finding fault with everything, the habit of throwing into print whatever men think or feel, have so confused and darkened men's minds that the Church's office as teacher has now become more than ever necessary to save Christians from being drawn away from conscience or duty."*

* Letter to Cardinal Gibbons.

This disposition to point out and to comment upon the supposed mistakes of her whom God has appointed to teach the nations—"Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations,"—and to whom He has conferred an authority equal to His own—"Who heareth you, heareth Me,"—is exceedingly common among those whom the world has inoculated with its own evil virus. In society one is constantly meeting with persons—and we speak, of course, of Catholics—who are full of the spirit of fault-finding, and who do not hesitate to express, and in no measured words, their disapproval of, or their objection to, first one doctrine or practice or custom or institution, and then to another. Some persons, for instance, will find fault with religious Orders and with the whole idea of the monastic life. They will speak of it as mediæval and archaic. Or they think that such institutions should be, at all events, limited to men. Or they will condescendingly allow that there "may possibly be some use in the active Orders" which render certain services to the world, and help the poor, the sick, and the ignorant; but they condemn the contempla-

tives as useless drones. They calmly assure us that they can see no use in those "long nightly vigils and those interminable psalms and canticles"; and, of course, if *they* can see no use, then, obviously, there can be none. That is clear; though to the more simple-minded, the Church, in such matters, would seem to be a more reliable and trustworthy judge.

Or, again, when some young girl of good family, and beautiful in soul as in body, listens to the promptings of grace and turns her back upon the world and all its attractions, to dedicate herself to the service of God, how often one hears the Church blamed and the whole institution of religious communities condemned! "She might have done so much more good in the world!" or "She has no right to shirk her duties to society"; or "She should have remained to grace the high position in which Providence had placed her," are the observations that one hears. Others will even say: "If some one *must* be sacrificed, why don't they send her ugly sister into the convent, and leave the pretty and attractive daughter in the world?" Thus even Catholics accept the opinions and

adopt the views of the world around them.

Or perhaps the criticism is passed, not upon the customs and discipline of the Church, but upon some clearly enunciated dogmatic truth. So greatly has the habit of criticising developed in recent years, and so inveterate is now the custom of throwing everything into the crucible of one's own mind, that few doctrines altogether escape the ordeal.

The eternity of hell is an instance in point. People affect to be very shocked at the dogma: in fact, they expend so much indignation upon this penalty of sin, that they have hardly any left for sin itself. It is not enough for them that God has declared that "the wicked shall go into *everlasting* punishment.' It appears to them cruel. But God is not cruel. To their notions it is "too, *too* horrible,"—as though their notions had anything to do with it. They pose the question, as though it settled the case: "What proportion is there between a mortal sin, however atrocious and however wilful, and eternal punishment?" They take the glimmering light of human reason as the supreme arbiter of Divine truth, and would make man's fallible mind the final

measure and supreme court of appeal concerning the doctrines of revelation. They do this because they have been listening to the world instead of to the Apostle, who cries out in warning words: "Be not wiser than it behoveth you to be wise." As though he would say: 'Do not try conclusions with God, nor imagine you know more than the infallible teacher whom He has appointed.' If all were so clear to the meanest intelligence, He would have dispensed with a teaching Church, and would not have commanded us to obey her under such fearful and appalling sanctions. "And if he will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican."

There are two facts clearly laid down by revelation. One fact is, God is love; the other fact is, hell is eternal. We may not be able to reconcile these two facts in a manner altogether satisfactory to our limited intelligences; but that is precisely because they are limited. That we can not possibly see *how* eternity of punishment is compatible with infinite goodness and mercy may be perfectly true. But it by no means follows that these two facts are in

reality irreconcilable. They seem to be opposed, while all the time they must necessarily be in the most complete accord. Nor is this apparent opposition to be wondered at, since such seeming contradictions are met with even in the order of nature, which lies far more within our grasp. Take an instance.

If two men stand on the equator of the earth, and one walks due east and the other due west, they seem to increase the distance between them every step they take. Any ordinary onlooker would declare most emphatically that the longer they continued to walk, the greater would become the space dividing them. It is only in more recent times—in facts, only since the rotundity of the earth has been proved—that we are able to correct so erroneous an impression, and are in a position to realize that, in reality, both men are making for the self-same point; that every step is taking them a degree nearer to it; and that eventually they will actually meet each other, and shake hands somewhere in the antipodes.

If incomplete and insufficient knowledge can result in such confusion of mind

and in such erroneous conclusions in ordinary earthly and material things, surely we should expect that our ignorance of the supernatural and the divine would often lead to far more erroneous judgments and to far more untenable opinions. In short, we should realize that our only security from error, in the spiritual order, is in giving up our own views, when contrary to the teaching of the Church, and in placing ourselves under the direction of her whose knowledge, within her own sphere, is neither superficial nor inexact.

Those who possess true humility—which is really but a practical knowledge of one's own limitations—know that there are, and must necessarily be, countless truths known to God which are unknown to man; and many which are not simply unknown to man, but wholly beyond his power of comprehension, in his present earthly state. The intellect bestowed upon us is infinitely less, as compared with the omniscience of God, than the light of the glow-worm's spark as compared with the light of the noonday sun. We know very little; but, thank God, we know quite enough,

if we know how to submit to our divinely appointed teacher.

Men seem to overlook the fact that difficulties which are real difficulties to us are no difficulties to God; and that what, in our present state, seems to be hard or even wholly impossible, will appear manifest, clear, and self-evident, so soon as faith gives place to actual vision, and our minds are flooded with the light of glory. "In Thy light we shall see light." But, owing to our environment, we easily come to judge things as the world judges them. We see with its eyes, we hear with its ears, and, like those around us, we grow weak and wanting in lively faith, by reason of our continual contact and intercourse with the world, which is ever hostile to the interests of God,—as, indeed, St. John implies when he tells us that "the world is the enemy of God."

The examples I have given are mere specimens; for there is scarcely a point of practical importance on which worldly men are not ready to pass judgment, or which they hesitate to subject to human criticism. But it would be tedious to multiply examples.

How far removed is all this from the true and thoroughly loyal Catholic spirit, which is ever a spirit of trust and confidence and love! Christ has established His Church for the express purpose of teaching and directing and admonishing us: "Go and teach." He has invested it with His own authority: "He that despiseth you despiseth Me." It is for us, then, as dutiful children, to obey her in the spirit of meekness; to sit thoughtfully at her feet, as Mary sat of old at the feet of our Blessed Lord; to hearken to her voice as to the voice of God; and to be willing to be taught and corrected and chided. The atmosphere of the world has, perhaps, gone far to rob us of that beautiful and childlike spirit; and we have grown too "wise in our own conceits" to conduct ourselves as children. Yet our Divine Master warns us that this is necessary: "Unless you become as children"—yea, as "little" children—"you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

The world scorns and jeers at us for our obedience, and speaks loudly and angrily of "personal freedom," and "intellectual independence," and "the tyranny of Rome," and what not. It flatters itself

that wisdom is made manifest by arrogance and pride and self-assertion. But Infinite Truth lays down quite another principle, and declares that "where wisdom is, there is humility." And this principle applies to the learned and the great quite as much as to the simple and the poor,—or rather it applies to the former even more directly and more especially. For this statement we may allege the authority, not of man, but of God, who says by the mouth of the author of Ecclesiasticus: "The greater thou art, the more humble thyself in all things, and then thou shalt find grace before God."

The fine lady reclining in her drawing-room, or the gay man about town, or the popular writer in his library, who calmly sets aside some decree of the Pope, or explains away some doctrine of revelation, or who questions the Church's right to put a book on the Index, or to make impediments in matrimony, or to forbid Catholics taking part in Protestant services, and so forth, may be a charming companion, but is not far from being a rebel at heart. Such a one manifests a disloyal and a dangerous spirit. It may seem as yet only a tiny spark; but, too often,

"from a spark cometh a great fire."

It is precisely such a spark, fanned into a flame and grown strong, that produces at length the heresiarchs and leaders of revolt, and that has lost so many souls to the Church. It is this spirit of distrust and discontent which, beginning in pride and self-sufficiency, ends in open apostasy and spiritual ruin. The earth is strewn with such human wreckage. "Be not high-minded, but fear." Trust not the wisdom of the world. And remember that "knowledge puffeth up," and "God resists the proud, and gives His graces to the humble."

The necessity of this prompt, hearty, and cheerful obedience and submission applies, of course, in the strictest and most absolute manner to all matters of faith,—that is to say, to all decrees and definitions emanating from ecumenical councils, and from Popes speaking in their capacity of universal teachers—*ex cathedra*—*urbi et orbi*. But it is the only fitting and desirable attitude even in regard to other doctrines, which are proposed to us with less stress and insistence. "To think as the Church thinks—*sentire cum Ecclesia*,—to be

of one mind with her, to obey her voice, is not a matter of duty in those cases only when the subject matter is one of divine revelation, or is connected therewith. It is an obligation also, whenever the subject matter of the Church's teaching falls within her authority. And that range comprises all that is necessary for feeding, teaching, and governing the flock. Under this ordinary authority, or *magisterium*, come the pastoral letters of bishops, diocesan and provincial decrees; and (though standing respectively on higher ground, as being of superior order and covering the whole Church) many acts of the Supreme Pontiff and all the decisions of the Roman Congregations. It is by virtue of ordinary ecclesiastical authority, not of infallibility, that the larger number of the hortative, directive and preceptive acts of the Church are issued."*

The attitude assumed by not a few Catholics in the world is neither edifying nor safe. Consider what the Church really is, and the sacred rôle confided to her. She is the creation of Christ Himself, the infinite

* A Pastoral Letter signed by the Cardinal Archbishop and all the bishops of the Province of Westminster A. D. 1900. p. 13.

God; and she is destined to represent Him, to be His *alter ego*. She exists to stem the tide of evil, to point out error, and to strike a warning note when the sacred deposit of divine truth is in danger of being tampered with. She possesses a divine life, and is informed and vivified by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Even where she does not pronounce a final and infallible sentence, her teaching is of the highest authority and not to be easily set aside. With her many saintly Pontiffs, archbishops and bishops, with her supernatural life, her wide and varied exprience and the tradition of well-nigh two thousand years, the Church is recognized even by a great many non-Catholics as the most enlightened governing body in the world. We may, then, well rest content to accept her as our mistress, to be directed by her laws and to be enlightened by her wisdom. In spite of what the world may say, we shall feel safe in her keeping; and shall realize that he who puts her aside, and makes his own faltering reason his sole guide, chooses a veritable fool for his counsellor. From which misfortune may God in His mercy deliver us! Amen.

II.

The Encroachments of the World.

Il ricco è tutto intento a godere dei beni che ha: l'avaro ad accrescere tesori a tesori; il disonesto a dar sfogo alle proprie infami passioni; il trafficante a stipular affari, imbrogliando questo e quello; il letterato a torturar l'ingegno onde inventare qualcosa da rendersi famoso e lucrare nel mondo; il contadino a svolgere la terra tra le maledizioni contro Dio e contro gli nomini; il povero come a passar nell' infingardaggine e nell' ozio la miserable esistenza. In una parola; *noi vediamo la più parte degli uomini non occuparsi che delle cose di questa terra.—Mgr. A. Bersani, Bishop of Patora, I. P. I.*

OF all created things, there is nothing on earth so precious or so admirable as the human soul, illuminated and elevated by divine grace. Its intrinsic value is so immense that words fail us when we attempt to describe it. No object that this world contains can bear any comparison with it. The entire wealth of the material universe, even if multiplied over and over a thousand times, could not purchase it. It surpasses, by an immeasurable distance, all that fancy can paint, or imagination picture, or mind conceive. Its unparalleled beauty, which is nothing less than the reflected beauty of the uncreated,

ever-blessed Trinity, draws down the love and complacency of God Himself, and fills His heart with ineffable tenderness and affection. Indeed, for the sake of winning it and repurchasing it after it was lost, He did what He did for no other,—no, not even for the Cherubim or the Seraphim. He came down from heaven, clothed Himself with our nature, and ransomed the soul of man by paying an infinite price—the price of His own Most Precious Blood.*

While wayfarers in this world, we walk by faith alone,† and dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death, so that we can not gaze upon the beauty of the invisible spirit within us, made to the image and likeness of the uncreated beauty of the Deity, and actually sharing, in some mysterious way, in the divine nature. *Divinæ naturæ particeps.*‡ It is only by the exercise of divine faith that we come to form a proper estimate of the dignity of our own soul when clothed with grace. It is faith only that enables us to accept the astounding fact that it possesses a beauty beyond all created beauties, an excellence beyond all

* Rom., v. 9. † II Cor., v. 7. ‡ II St. Peter, i. 4.

created excellences, and a splendor beyond all created splendors; and, further, that it is destined, if only it be faithful and persevering, not only to sit with God upon His throne amid the undreamed glories of the heavenly palace, but even to add something to the ravishing loveliness of that celestial abode.

But, alas! how few there are who at all realize their own spiritual pre-eminence, or who even, strange to say, deem it worth preserving! Alas! how many show themselves utterly unconcerned about it, and ready foolishly to barter it away for the merest trifle, and to forfeit all for the satisfaction of some unclean pleasure or the indulgence of some base passion! "When man was in honor, he did not understand: he hath been compared to senseless beasts, and made like to them."*

But, gentle reader, if *we* are foolish and inappreciative, there are others who are wise enough to recognize the treasure that we carry "in earthen vessels." Satan and the other fallen angels are fully conscious of the peerless value of even the least soul, made to God's image and redeemed by

* Ps. xlviii. 21.

His death. Those keen, penetrating intelligences, unhampered by the trammels of flesh, see, as no man living can possibly see, its dignity and unapproachable excellence; and, since they are consumed by an insatiable jealousy of us, and an implacable hatred of God, they watch every opportunity to rob us of our prize, and Him of our allegiance.

This is no idle fancy, no nightmare born of a diseased imagination, but a solemn truth attested by divine revelation. The Holy Spirit of God assures us, of what some of us seem strangely unconscious—namely, that we are living and moving in the very midst of powerful and hostile forces, and ever surrounded by sleepless enemies who are on our trail night and day, plotting our downfall, and laying snares to entrap the presumptuous and the unwary. "The devil goeth about," fierce and menacing and pitiless, "as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."*

It is by reason of his rage and anger and power that the Apostle compares him to a lion; yet, inasmuch as he is invisible and

* I St. Peter, v., 8

impervious to the senses, we may surely say that the devil is a greater menace to our spiritual life than even the most ferocious beast of the forest is to our physical life. A visible enemy we may more easily guard against; a visible enemy we watch and avoid; a visible enemy we may elude and escape from. But who will deliver us from the hosts of evil spirits who haunt us at every step, and whose cunning is surpassed only by their malice? I say "hosts," and I say so advisedly, since their "name is legion." Are we not expressly warned by St. Paul that "our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places"?*

These alarming words are inspired by God, the Eternal Truth. Then we may well ask ourselves to what purpose are they uttered. Why does God strike this note of warning? Is it, perchance, that we should pay no heed? No. It is that we should grow more and more sensible of our peril, and that we should be per-

* Eph., vi, 12.

suaded to watch and pray, lest we be seduced. In a word, it is that we should realize our position, and set a guard on every avenue by which the enemy may gain an entry into our hearts; that we should tread the slippery path of life with the utmost caution and circumspection, and, as St. Paul says, "take unto ourselves the armor of God, that we may be able to resist";* and, "casting off the works of darkness, put on the armor of light."†

Satan is a consummate general. He has at his command an immense force, which he marshals with wondrous skill; and, as a consequence, the injury he inflicts on souls is prodigious. His stratagems are various and subtle; and, unless we can detect them, we run a serious risk of falling into his toils. There is one stratagem which, at first glance, seems so harmless and so innocent that it excites no apprehension, and disarms even the most suspicious. The cruel hook is so cleverly hidden beneath the bait that we can scarcely be persuaded that it is there until at last, like the unwary fish, we are caught.

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* Ephes., vi, 13. † Rom., xiii, 12.

To realize this we had better compare the devil's tactics with those of an ordinary general who has made up his mind to get possession of some important fortress. He may adopt one of two courses. He may, of course, bombard it, undermine its foundations, and blow it to pieces, and so force an entry; or he may follow a totally opposite plan,—that is to say, he may decide to reduce it to submission, without firing so much as one shot, or exploding so much as a single mine. He simply surrounds it with his army, closes up every channel by which provisions can enter, and cuts off all the necessities of life. The result is the garrison is obliged to capitulate. This second scheme will be found quite as effective as the first. For the absence of food will soon make itself felt. Weakness and disease and discontent will become rife among the soldiers defending the fortress, until, seeing themselves reduced to the last extremity, and face to face with death, they will surrender to the victorious general. Thus, without striking a blow or firing a gun, the end is obtained.

By similar means the devil strives to

enter into possession of our souls. They are the important fortresses against which he directs his attacks. Assisted and abetted by his able lieutenants, the Flesh and the World, he is ever seeking to reduce them to captivity. How? Not always by assaulting the citadel of our soul directly. Not by drawing us into the immediate commission of some grievous sin, or deadly crime crying to Heaven for vengeance; but simply by quietly and gradually cutting off our spiritual supplies, and withholding from us all access to the ordinary channels of divine grace, such as prayer and the sacraments and other spiritual aids. And in this he is often, alas! only too successful.

For observe: as the body of man is not self-supporting, so neither is the soul. As the body depends upon many external conditions for its general health and well-being, so is it with the soul. The body needs food, drink, clothing, shelter, air, light, and sleep. These things are not merely desirable: they are essential. Without their aid the body can not continue to live. Should an assassin desire to destroy my bodily life, there is no need for him to thrust a dagger into my heart; he need

not approach me or touch a hair of my head. All that he need do is to cut off my supplies. If only he can deprive me of food or of drink or of air or of sleep, his victory is complete. Death will follow with absolute certainty.

The same truth holds good of the life of the soul. "Not in bread alone does man live,"* says the Holy Spirit. No; for man has a spiritual as well as a corporal life, and he requires a supersubstantial bread to maintain it in health. He must have leisure for communion with God, for prayer, for the reception of the sacraments, and for much else. Indeed, prayer is to the soul what food is to the body. Deprive it of that, and it must needs languish and perish. The sacraments are likewise necessary, being the special channels of divine grace and favor, instituted by God to bring strength and vigor to our souls. In addition to these there are many other sources of grace, only less important than the above, such as meditation and reflection on the eternal truths, spiritual reading, examination of conscience, and so forth.

* St. Matt., iv, 4.

These duties, daily attended to, soon create what I may describe as a certain atmosphere most favorable for the development of piety and holiness. In this atmosphere the soul freely expands and develops, and produces choice fruits of virtue, as do plants in a tropical climate. It breathes more freely and grows strong and stately and robust in so suitable an environment. Consider, for example, the advantages of spiritual reading, in which we are brought, as it were, face to face with the noblest and most heavenly-minded of all ages. As we study the acts of the martyrs, and contemplate the heroism of the saints, we are stirred by their noble example, encouraged by their dauntless fortitude, and set all on fire by their splendid loyalty to God and their unwavering devotion to His Church. As we go on from page to page, and indeed long after we have finished our reading and laid the book aside, we feel as though we were really living and moving among God's saints, sharing their society and enjoying their conversation; and we gain strength of soul and of character by their very nearness and companionship. In short

the soul stands in need of a great many helps and encouragements for the full development and perfect attainment of its spiritual health.

Consequently, if it is really to enjoy any degree of vigor, it must secure leisure and opportunity to utilize and turn to account the various means that God has so lovingly destined for the purpose. Time is essential; it can not be dispensed with on any pretext whatsoever; nothing else can take its place. But the devil has to be reckoned with; and he clearly sees that to ruin our souls, one of the surest means is to starve them out. And, since the world at the present day may be relied upon to second his perfidious designs, and render them effectual, this is the means he is mostly inclined to make use of. It best suits the exigencies of the period in which our lot is cast. The reason is obvious.

In former days men enjoyed much more leisure than they do now. The course of human life flowed by more evenly and calmly. Populations were smaller, and men were more widely separated one from the other. The means of travelling were slow

and inadequate; hence people stayed much at home, and seldom strayed beyond the limits of their own village. They were far simpler in their tastes; few could read, and the daily paper, with all its sensational news, was unknown. Both men and women were content with homely pastimes and rural games and simple amusements, and led an uneventful existence. They scarcely troubled themselves about the world at large, or looked beyond their own immediate circle.

Now all this has changed. To-day we have vaster populations than we know what to do with, and congested districts where men stand perpetually in each other's way; and, while they demand, and indeed seem to require, much more than formerly, the means of subsistence are not so easily obtainable. It is a very hard struggle to make ends meet. There is a fierce and bitter contest going on, so that the day of twenty-four hours is found all too short. Men in this twentieth century live in a perpetual rush, in a fever of excitement, and in a ceaseless whirl of business. They can not spare a moment, but must be ever with the harness on their

backs. The result is that, not having time for everything, they are disposed to allow the world and worldly interests to encroach more and more upon their thoughts and minds, till at last the supreme interests of their souls are thrust aside, or compelled to sit and wait like beggars in the antechamber of their brain, till temporal business has been attended to and dispatched, which often means till the soul itself languishes from neglect and privation.

Satan watches the course of events with diabolical satisfaction, and recognizes in the modern world a valuable ally. He is the astute general bent upon reducing our soul to captivity. Well does he know the value of prayer and the sacraments, and the other means of grace. It is his purpose, therefore, to deprive us of such helps, to hinder us from making use of them, to keep them well out of our reach, and literally to destroy our spiritual life by starvation. What does it signify to him whether we perish everlastingly through yielding to some sudden and violent assault, or through a gradual process of exhaustion and starvation? Nothing whatever.

Such, then, is the end in view. And how is Satan going to realize it? What are the means? He calls into his service the aid of the world, with all its modern requirements and exactions; and the world undertakes to close in upon us, slowly perhaps, but surely, and absorb us. Its aim and object, let us speak plainly, is to gain complete control over the whole of our time,—to possess it entirely, and to claim every hour for itself. It enters into a man's heart, and will acknowledge no rival. It says: "You are all mine; your interests, your ambitions, your desires are mine; your talents and your gifts and your fortune must be placed at my service and employed as I suggest." The world may not suggest anything evil in itself. True; and in this especially the danger really lies. For if it did, our suspicions would be aroused; we should be put on the defensive, and might resist and overcome. But it counsels no crime, it proposes no direct sin. In fact, this is in no sense requisite for the devil's purpose. It is enough if he can only keep us so occupied and absorbed in anything whatsoever as to exclude God and spiritual things from

our thoughts, and gradually deprive us of our spiritual life by shutting out all that is essential to its support and well-being. Our hearts and minds are too circumscribed to take in everything; and to fill them up to the very brim with the world is the same thing as to empty them entirely of God.

It is the hurry and bustle of the present age, and the continuous and ever-increasing demands made upon our limited time, that constitute a very real and a very pressing spiritual danger. Our life is such a round of work and worry if we are poor, and of pleasure and dissipation if we are rich, that it often happens that no sufficient margin is reserved for the necessary exercises of devotion. In a word, the claims of this world allow no place for the claims of the next, and jostle them out as unwarrantable intruders.

Call to mind the hours consumed in dressing and undressing, and in the personal care and adornment of the corruptible body; consider the breakfasts and luncheons and five-o'clock teas, and the interminable dinners and late suppers; count the hours spent in paying unneces-

sary visits and making afternoon calls; note the chatter and gossip, and the idle, if not ill-natured, talk that runs away with quite an appreciable fraction of our brief life. Then there are operas, and theatres, and concerts, and pantomimes, and small dances, and great balls, and political reunions, and fashionable parties, and literary gatherings, and *conversaziones*, and "At homes." And in the midst of this whirl of worldliness and dissipation, what becomes of our spiritual interests? They are forgotten, lost sight of, neglected.

If a few minutes' lull comes to us in the midst of this bustle and excitement, it is immediately filled up; for "we must just peep into the last batch of books from the Times library," or take a hurried glance over the evening paper, and see how Lady This or Lord That has been distinguishing herself or himself in the law courts, for embezzlement or breach of promise. And so, in one way or another, every moment is crammed full. And though, as each day flies by, we are not conscious of having done anything radically wrong and sinful, yet our soul grows gradually but unmistakably weaker and feebler, because it is

slowly starving, starving, starving. With the Royal Prophet, we might well cry out in tones of agony, did we realize our state: "My heart is withered, because I forgot to eat my bread."*

There is no doubt that the Evil One carefully studies our inclinations and passions, our preferences and tendencies, our likes and dislikes, in order that he may craftily enlist them all in his service; for it is according to the art of war for a commander to make everything, if possible even the very elements, fight on his side. Perhaps he perceives that we are much interested in politics. It matters not a straw whether we be Liberal or Conservative, Home Rulers or Radicals, Socialists, Democrats or Republicans. If only he can prevail upon us to become absorbed by some political aim, to live for it, to dream of it by night, to work for it by day, and to sacrifice even our religious interests for it, the devil's end is gained. Provided only that we are complacent enough to allow him to strangle us, he is quite willing to accommodate us by employing a silken cord instead of a hempen one.

* Ps., ci, 5.

Observe, the whole danger consists in becoming engrossed. What the particular nature of the object that engrosses us may be, matters little or nothing. It may, of course, be something distinctly harmful or objectionable in itself, such as gambling, horse-racing, betting, card-playing, drinking and carousing; but this is by no means necessary. In fact, the devil far oftener beguiles us by something quite innocent or even praiseworthy, such as our professional duties, or the inordinate love of books, even serious books, or study or literature. Or it may even be art or music or science or stock-broking or farming or athletics, or anything else *carried to excess*, provided only that it fills our time and thoughts to the exclusion of spiritual things.

This is by no means a fanciful case. Such innocuous occupations not unfrequently become a regular passion, take complete possession of the mind, and swallow up all our leisure. The interest becomes so keen and uncontrollable that at last we sacrifice our duties to God in order more fully to indulge our favorite amusement or occupation, and to gain additional time. It is allowed to encroach

more and more upon the hours set aside for prayer and other religious exercises. Everything must yield to its imperious demands. It crushes out or thrusts to one side first one spiritual duty, then another. It rises like a tide, and spreads over our whole life, and swamps everything.

Perhaps my remarks, so far, may seem applicable only to the wealthy and the prosperous; but they are in reality quite as applicable to the poor and the indigent, who are obliged to toil for their daily bread. Yes, their danger also is that of being absorbed by the world around them, though it is in a somewhat different manner. With the working classes, it is not pleasure and dissipation and amusement, but rather the unfortunate conditions of their state, and the enormous demands made upon them by the peculiar nature of their trade or business. We know, alas! all too well the keen rivalry that now exists among the members of every craft, and the severe struggle for existence, together with the long hours, and overwork, and the accompanying sense of weariness and depression, not to speak of actual despair, that takes hold of

many of our less fortunate brethren.

This incessant work, work, work, morning, noon, and night, puts a terrible strain upon the body and upon the mind. This continuous hand-to-hand wrestling with famine and want, this perpetual effort to keep the wolf from the door, carried on without rest or hope of better things, year in and year out, is a horrible obstacle to piety and holiness. The very condition of such a life so rivets the attention upon present necessities as to divert it almost entirely from those of the future. It not only shuts out all thoughts of another world, but often seems to render men physically unfit to perform their religious duties in this.

How many a poor, hard-working man retires to rest on a Saturday night so utterly weary and worn, and so completely broken down and exhausted by his week's slaving in factory, mine or coal-pit, that on Sunday morning he feels physically unable to rise and assist at Mass and attend to the services of his Church! How many are so pressed by poverty and driven on by competition that they will work all Sunday as well as weekdays, as their only

chance of keeping pace with their competitors! The absorption of the entire man by the world is one of the greatest curses of the age in which our lot is cast, and one of the hardest problems to solve. Who shall say how many thousands in this way have ceased altogether to frequent the services of the Church, and have become wholly lost to the Faith!

It has been shown that within five or six miles of Charing Cross, in London, there are literally hundreds of thousands of persons who never cross the threshold of any church, who never practise any form of religion, who never bow the head or bend the knee in prayer to their Creator and Redeemer, and who, for all practical purposes, are as pagan as the South Sea Islanders or the heathen Chinese. They are bound hand and foot in the deadly grasp of the powers of the world.

We are not excusing their irreligion and their indifference: we are merely, in part, accounting for it, and pointing to one among many circumstances which help to bring it about. There is no harm, certainly, in a man making shoes and boots, or suits of clothes, or driving an

omnibus, or keeping an eating-house, and so forth. But if competition be so keen and the struggle so close that he is induced to carry on his trade, not only on all the weekdays but during the whole of Sunday too, then his soul is in the position of the fortress surrounded by the enemy, and God alone can save him. If the making of boots or clothes, or any other manufactured article, is to absorb him, fill his time, occupy his thoughts, and drive out all that is noblest and best and most spiritual and Godlike in his nature, converting him into a mere machine, it becomes a curse and a snare and a source of very real and grave danger. The devil has reduced *that* soul, at all events; and desperate is its lot.

We, gentle reader, are probably living in easier circumstances; and yet, even without the same excuses and violent temptations, we too may be in some danger of allowing the world to gain too great a dominion over our hearts and over our thoughts and over our time. The process by which the world gradually insinuates itself and enters into possession is generally slow and cautious. It makes its

advance by certain regular stages. Take, for instance, our prayers morning and evening. At the outset of our career, we begin by saying them with much attention, fervor, and earnestness, realizing that we are indeed addressing an infinite and omnipotent Being, the all-pure, and the all-wise, upon whose favor we are entirely dependent. But that was when we had more leisure. Now our day has grown so full! We are living in a whirlwind of excitement and anxiety and stress of mind. Our prayers partake of the general speed and bustle and restlessness of our day. They are said—if said at all—hurriedly, distractedly, and with our mind on something else. We bring no devotion, no unction to these holy exercises. The next step is to shorten them. We content ourselves with a Sign of the Cross and a few muttered aspirations. Too probably we arrive at last at a point at which we think we may dispense with them altogether.

And what has been said of our morning and night prayers may be applied, in a greater or lesser degree, to all other important means of divine grace, such as

confession, Communion, Mass, sermons, examination of conscience, spiritual reading, and the rest.

We have no time! No time for the one thing necessary! Life is hurrying us on too rapidly. The world is too much with us, and the whole of our conscious existence is taken up with transitory and earthly affairs. We have not a moment to give to God, not a moment to devote to the vital and eternal interests of our souls, because the whole of our life is already consecrated to the service of the world. Thus the enemy starves us out and reduces us to captivity.

Eternity is looming in the distance. But we have no time to prepare for it. Heaven with its vistas of supreme delights and its endless joys, and hell with its quenchless flames and its excruciating agonies, are before us. Toward the one or the other of these two eternities we are hastening with inconceivable speed, but we are too busy even to inquire which of the two it is! Before many more seasons have run their course, we shall find ourselves standing in presence of the Great White Throne, and listening to the voice

of the Judge of the living and the dead as He questions us upon our life and conduct. Yes, we know that this hour is approaching, we are fully aware of it; yet we pay no heed. We are too much taken up with the trivialities of the present moment to trouble ourselves about eternal issues. O heedless and foolish, why do you allow the devil to tie a bandage over your eyes, and to drive you blindfolded to destruction? Well may the inspired writer exclaim: "With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that considereth in the heart."*

Perhaps Dives, the rich man of the Gospel narrative, may be taken as a type of many a wealthy man living at the present day. His sin, it must be remembered, was neither murder nor theft nor blasphemy, nor anything else calculated to excite horror and indignation in good men. It seems to have consisted simply and solely in making himself his own centre. He did not abuse or murmur against God: He just ignored Him; he found no room for Him in his daily routine of pleasure and business, and lived without Him. We

* Jer., xii 11.

are told that this rich man was clothed in purple and fine linen; but that is no crime. We are also informed that he feasted sumptuously every day; but no one will have the hardihood to affirm that it is, in itself, a grievous sin, deserving of eternal damnation, to sit down to a good dinner. No: his fault, according to the view of the great commentators, was that he lived without God. The world and its vanities filled his heart and his mind. Its pleasures and its interests, its dinners and its banquets, its parties and its social duties, so possessed and occupied his thoughts that there was no place left for God and spiritual things.

Observe, it was not that he went out of his way to insult or to outrage God, or to deny His authority and dominion; not at all. He simply closed his eyes to the spiritual world altogether, and took no notice of it; treated it, in fact, as though it had no objective reality. To him, in short, the invisible was not only invisible, it was non-existent. The result was he lost his soul, which could not live while cut off from all the sources of spiritual life. God rejected him, and condemned

him to be cast out of His presence into the exterior darkness. As he had refused to give God any share in his temporal life and thought in this world, so God refused to give him any share in His eternal life in the next world. And thus will He act with all who wilfully exclude Him from their lives.

We may reasonably hope, dear readers, that there are not many amongst ourselves who have allowed things to go so far as Dives did. But are there not some of us who are at least travelling in the same direction? Let us look into our own hearts and consider whether the world is not getting some little hold upon us. Weigh well its influence, and beware lest it be growing too strong. See if it is not, at all events, beginning to engross, if not all, at least too considerable a share of our daily thoughts, and leading us to abandon many a holy practice, many a helpful devotion. It may be urged that our duties are manifold and important, that our position is one of exceptional trust and grave responsibility, and that a great number of obligations press upon us. True. Yet, notwithstanding this, we are

bound to remember that God must always be given the first place in our hearts. His claims must take precedence of all others. If it is impossible to crowd into our day all that we should wish, we are bound to prefer eternal interests to those of time, and the service of God to the service of the world. "Seek *first* the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you."*

In this, we may learn a valuable lesson from the saints. Many of them were very much occupied, and had innumerable duties to perform; they were statesmen, kings, bishops, Popes. But we shall find that, however much engaged in affairs of Church or of State, they never allowed their duties toward their neighbor or toward their country to encroach unduly upon their duties toward God nor upon the hours allotted to prayer.

Take such instances as those of St. Pius V., St. Louis of France, and St. Charles Borromeo. Here we have a Pope, a King, and a great Bishop of an important diocese; each, therefore, a very busy man. If business could ever excuse the

* St. Matt., vi, 33.

neglect of prayer, surely a Pope might hold himself excused. Consider his position, his relationship with every part of the world, his solicitude for all the churches; the constant appeals coming to him from every quarter; the thousands of archbishops, bishops, patriarchs, and delegates and officials, who must see him and take counsel with him; and the endless audiences he must give to all sorts and conditions of men. Who amongst us, gentle reader, is so much occupied as he?

Or take King Louis of France, ruling over a mighty nation and full of anxiety for the welfare of his people. Think of the demands made upon his time, by sovereigns, ministers, deputies from foreign courts, and others! He has scarcely one moment he can call his own. Like St. Charles, his office places him in an altogether exceptional position of activity and mental strain. Yet these three great saints spent many hours each day in close communion with God. Or if, on occasion, the day proved too inconveniently full, they would borrow some hours from the night, so anxious were they to secure light and refreshment to their souls. They, at

least, knew how to seek first the kingdom of God. Nay, more: they realized that even worldly duties will receive no blessing from God if He is neglected that they may be accomplished. So, every four and twenty hours, for some considerable interval, they shut out the world and its cares and troubles, that they might give up their whole hearts to God and to the contemplation of divine things.

Dear readers, the end is approaching; and well-nigh closed is the brief, brawling day of our earthly existence, with its noisy phantoms, as Carlyle expresses it, its poor paper crowns, tinsel-gilt; and divine everlasting Night, with her star-diadems, with her silences and her veracities, is upon us. The eternal gates fly open, and we are drawn in—to heaven or else to hell,—it remains for us to decide which it is to be. May He who is to judge us help us to realize our responsibility, and to realize it before it is too late! Yes, let me repeat: *before it is too late.* For our lives glide on. "The river ends we don't know where, and the sea begins; and then there is no more jumping ashore."*

* Vide: Felix Holt.

III.

Calling Good Evil, and Evil Good.

> Und was
> Ist Zufall anders, als der rohe Stein,
> Der Leben annimmt unter Bildners Hand?
> Den Zufall gibt die Vorsehung—zum Zwecke
> Muss ihn der Mensch gestalten.
>
> —*Schiller.*

SINCE the Providence of God has placed us in this world for the express purpose of being tried, no watchfulness or prudence upon our part will enable us to escape altogether from temptation. Whether we live in the midst of the noisy world and occupy ourselves in trade and business, or whether we fly into the silent desert and lead a life of perpetual solitude and prayer, it is all the same: we shall most certainly have our spiritual battles to fight and our spiritual enemies to overcome. The poor may not have the same trials as the rich, nor servants and dependents the same difficulties as masters and mistresses; but all of us, without exception, and whatever may be our calling, are sure to meet with many tribu-

lations of one kind or another, and to have our virtue thoroughly exercised during the course of our earthly career, be it short or be it long.

The devil, the world and the flesh are our chief enemies; and so persistent are they that it is impossible to continue long without experiencing their hostility. Yet the manner in which they make their assaults differs very considerably from age to age. Sometimes they will seek to lead us astray by exciting fear and terror, while at other times they will rather strive to beguile us with soft and honeyed words; the end sought is always the same, the means employed are often quite opposite.

In this connection, we are forcibly reminded of one of Æsop's well-known fables. We refer to that in which he represents the Sun and the Wind disputing with each other as to which of them exercised the greater influence and power over the world of men. Since each claimed the superiority, and neither would yield to the other, they finally consented to try their skill upon a poor belated traveller, who chanced to be pursuing his way, along a rugged and difficult ascent,

toward his native village, and then to abide by the result. The victory was to be declared in favor of the competitor who should first compel the traveller to remove a thick cloak that was now hanging loosely from his shoulders.

The Wind was the first to essay the task. It blew and blew and blew with all its might and main, and raised such a blast that the traveller could scarcely keep his footing. It caught up the dust and scattered the withered leaves and the dry twigs far and wide, and enveloped the unfortunate man in a perfect whirlwind. Then it seized hold of his cloak by every available fold and lappet, and tugged and pulled and wrestled and strove with relentless energy, until it had worked itself into a regular phrensy of passion. But all to no purpose; in fact, the more violently the Wind howled and raged and beat upon the traveller, the more tightly and resolutely did he grasp his cloak, and the more closely did he draw its folds about him. The Wind, utterly disgusted, then subsided, and, abandoning the useless struggle, defied the Sun to succeed any better.

The Sun, nothing loath, at once issued forth in all its glory from behind a dark cloud, and darted down its fiery rays upon the weary pedestrian. Already hot and tired, he became yet more so. But the Sun, without pity, continued to shoot down its scorching beams upon him with ever-increasing fierceness. At last the wretched man, panting for breath and perspiring from every pore, began to loosen the folds of his cloak, and, finally unfastening it, threw it off altogether. Thus the Sun easily won in the contest. Its quiet, penetrating action proved far more efficacious and powerful than all the bluster and noisy violence of the Wind.

In this ingenious story we find a very excellent and apt illustration of the two different plans the devil makes use of in order to persuade us poor travellers, wending our way along the strait and difficult path of virtue, to divest ourselves of the supernatural garment of divine grace. In bygone days, we were in imminent danger from the fierce winds and storms of cruel persecution. The old Roman emperors left no stone unturned in their efforts to crush out and utterly

destroy the infant Church. Their arguments were torture, fire and the sword, ruthlessly applied century after century, until, literally, millions had been butchered and done to death on account of their loyalty to Christ and the Gospel.

In England, too, after a thousand years of comparative religious peace, a similar spirit took possession of the King and his greedy and servile minions. The glorious Catholic Faith, that for ten long centuries had been England's boast and England's glory, was forbidden by Act of Parliament. The heaviest penalties were enforced upon all who preferred the law of God to the law of man. Thousands of persons, of both sexes and of all ages, whose only offence was loyalty to God and to conscience, were fined, imprisoned, racked, tortured, or transported beyond the seas. They were stripped of all they possessed, and, in many cases, hanged and drawn and quartered, without pity—and for what? For holding what countless generations of Englishmen had held before them—namely, that the Pope is the divinely appointed representative of Christ upon earth, and the supreme spiritual

head of His Church; and for denying that which no Englishman till then had ever been called on to affirm—namely, that the King, within his own dominions, is supreme, not only in civil and worldly matters, but in those also which are purely religious and ecclesiastical. As a consequence, the noblest heads rolled on the block, and the grandest and most splendid characters were brutally murdered at the behest of an infamous and adulterous King.

Such times are happily passed, or survive as mere memories amongst us; and full liberty now exists, at least in English-speaking countries, for everyone to believe or to disbelieve, just as his fancy or his inclination may suggest. Indeed, nowhere (except in France?) does there seem any likelihood of the cloak of divine grace being rudely torn from our backs by the storm of direct persecution. Still, though this form of danger no longer menaces us, there is yet considerable risk lest, under the pressure of another and a more insidious power, we should be induced to cast off our cloaks—in other

words, to renounce our allegiance to God—of our own free will.

The old serpent still lives. His hatred and malevolence are as deep and as strong as ever, but he has changed his tactics. He no longer exhibits himself as "the roaring lion" described by St. Peter, "going about seeking whom he may devour," and striking terror and consternation into every breast by his threats of torture and of death. No. In these days he generally seems to prefer the disguise he assumed in the Garden of Eden. As a deceitful and wily serpent, he strives to insinuate himself into our hearts by the exercise of duplicity, craft, and cunning. This I take to be one of the special dangers of these times, against which I wish now to warn the gentle reader.

The devil's modern and up-to-date weapons are deceit, falsehood, and misrepresentation. Indeed, God seems to send a special message to us, in this twentieth century, from the remote past. For He certainly refers to modern and up-to-date methods when, speaking by the mouth of His prophet Isaias, He denounces and anathematizes all those followers of Satan

"who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter."* In any case, these inspired words most accurately describe the system and plan followed by the three great enemies of our salvation, in this highly refined, enlightened and boastful twentieth century. The world no longer looks with favor on persecution. It has gone out of fashion, like the pointed shoes and stiff frills of a former generation. Yet the world is still our enemy, and it is still our duty to be ever on our guard against it.

The world! But perhaps the reader will ask what I mean by "the world." Let me, then, say that I mean what the disciple St. John meant when he said: "Love not the world."† I mean what St. Paul meant when he wrote to the Romans (xii, 2): "Be not conformed to this world." In fine, I mean what Jesus Christ meant when He said: "Fear not: I have overcome the world."‡ Yes, this is the world to which I refer. It is the enemy of God; it is continually striving

* Isaias, v, 20. † I St. John, ii, 15.

‡ St. John, xvi, 33.

by every means within its reach to draw us away from the service of God, and to plunge us into sin, and to deprive us of all the great sources of grace and strength, especially of prayer and the sacraments.

Such is its set purpose. And what are the means it employs? Well! Now that harsher means are frowned down upon, it has recourse to every kind of stratagem, deception, and misrepresentation; so that, unless we are able to detect its sophistries and to see through its cunning, we shall be in imminent risk of losing our souls.

Suffer me to explain. The world is far too astute openly and frankly to condemn what is good. If it attempted such a thing, we should see through its malice at once, and be put on our guard. Consequently, it most carefully conceals its enmity under an assumed and hypocritical appearance of friendship. It makes great professions in order to deceive us and lead us astray. It encourages vice by calling it virtue, and will so deck out and adorn evil that the unwary will often mistake it for good. By these means thousands allow themselves to be taken in. An example or two will enable us to

see how this plan works. Thus, if a man be conceited and arrogant, domineering with his servants, and overbearing and imperious with his friends, quick to pick a quarrel, and hyper-sensitive and exacting about what he is pleased to call his rights, and so forth, he can be described only as a proud man. Now, if he realizes and acknowledges that he is proud, there are great hopes of his ultimate conversion and repentance. But if he refuses even to call it "pride," if, on the contrary, he calls it "firmness" or "courage" or "justice," or any other high-sounding name,—how will he ever fight against it? The very first step in his reformation must be to diagnose his case correctly, and to recognize the truth. Until he can acknowledge to himself, with all sincerity, "I am a proud man," he will never acquire the virtue of true humility; no, nor even set out in quest of it.

Similar observations may be made in many other cases. Take, for instance, any religious duty that we, as Catholics, are called upon to perform,—let us say the duty of fasting or almsgiving. It is astonishing how easily the world will

persuade us to neglect it, and on wholly false grounds. To understand the situation, it must be borne in mind that most people suffer far more from eating too much than from eating too little. So eminent a physician as Dr. Vorke Davies, to quote a single authority, says: "There is far more harm done by taking too much food than there is by taking too little, and it is only in very exceptional cases that injury results from the latter cause; whereas an enormous amount of discomfort, disorder, and disease, and even curtailment of life, arise from excess in eating."* Indeed, it is said that thirty per cent of the diseases for which medical men prescribe, arise from eating too much. Yet people pretend they can not now even abstain!

The medical faculty are constantly prescribing for persons whose ailments arise (though they seldom venture to say so *openly*) from over-indulgence. Doctors tell us that the weekly abstinence on Friday, and the occasional fast-days throughout the year, are excellent even from a hygienic point of view, and that any one in ordi-

* "Foods for the Fat," p. 46.

narily fair health would be all the better for their observance. But we have not the spirit of self-denial and are unwilling to deprive ourselves of anything; consequently, we persuade ourselves that we are far too delicate to follow the Church's prescriptions, and would seriously injure ourselves by taking an ounce less than our appetite demands. "The wish is father to the thought," and will lead us to accept dispensations which we really have no business to seek. *Mundus vult decipi.* The world wishes to be deceived, and so do many of us also.

We allow ourselves to be similarly cajoled in the matter of almsgiving and the disposal of our wealth. Our bountiful God, in the pages of Holy Writ, frequently points out the obligations and the spiritual advantages of giving to those in need. "By charity of the Spirit serve one another," He says;* and, "He who soweth sparingly shall also reap sparingly."† So again: "According to thy ability be merciful. If thou have much, give abundantly; if thou have little, take care even so to bestow willingly a little. . . . For

* Gal., v, 13. † II Cor., ix, 6.

alms deliver from all sin and from death, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness."* And many other similar texts occur throughout the Bible. In these words God urges us to lay up for ourselves eternal treasures in heaven, and to make compensation for our innumerable offences and failings; assuring us at the same time that whatever we give to the indigent in His name, He will take as given to Himself. "As long as you did it to one of these My least brethren you did it to Me."

Now, our spiritual enemies are naturally unwilling that we should reap all the advantages that are so closely bound up with the exercise of generosity and compassion toward the poor, and will do all they can to dissuade us from carrying out the recommendations of Holy Scripture. Yet, if they are to succeed, they are well aware that they must act very cautiously. They dare not show their hand, by openly condemning that which God commends; so, while admitting the excellence of generosity in general and in the abstract, they cunningly suggest a thousand plausible reasons which relieve us

* Tobias, iv, 8-11.

individually from any such obligation. Thus, one man will say: "Oh, I make it a rule never to give anything to a beggar in the street!" Not, of course, because he is ungenerous. No! That must never be even hinted at. But simply because "beggars are always, or nearly always, impostors, and I should be encouraging idleness." Indeed, he will willingly admit that "almsgiving is a most admirable thing, but we must not countenance imposture. Besides, the recipients are sure to spend it in drink." But neither will these men bestow a penny upon beggars who came to their doors. Not because they are unwilling to part with their money—at least, that is not the reason they care to allege,—but because "one beggar will attract another, and the constant visits of these tatterdemalions become a regular nuisance. Besides, it would never do to entice tramps and doubtful characters about the house." Thus, for one reason or another, they excuse themselves from giving anything to anybody.

In some cases a man's income, though considerable enough, is not equal to his pretensions, and he is anxious to keep

up appearances. He occupies a certain position or rank in society, and every farthing is needed if he is to continue living in his present style, and to retain his customary staff of servants and dependants. He is really very sorry, or imagines he is. In fact, he does not hesitate to say that were he only as wealthy as A or as B, it would be positive joy to him to found hospitals and to erect churches, schools, and orphan asylums. In short, he quite envies millionaires and possessors of colossal fortunes their opportunities and all the good they might do; and consoles himself by thinking how very much more generous he would be than they are, were he but treated half so well by Dame Fortune. But, alas! with his modest revenues, it is as much as he can do to clothe and educate his children, and live up to the requirements of his position. Further, he reflects that he is bound to put something by for a rainy day, and that "it won't do to be improvident." And so, for one specious pretext or another, life passes, and he rests perfectly satisfied, though he never makes any real sacrifice for the sake of God or for

the sake of His poor suffering brethren.

Observe, I do not wish to imply that there is never any grain of truth or of reason in the foregoing statement. Quite the contrary. The very danger of such arguments lies precisely in the fact that there is just enough of truth in them to render them effective; just enough reason to quiet our consciences, and to persuade us that all is as it should be. It is a well recognized fact that there is no lie so difficult to deal with as a lie which is half a truth, and great candor is needed to detect its real character. Pure brass we may always know, but when mixed with gold it may often pass for the more precious metal.

But to continue. Excessive parsimony is simply niggardliness and stinginess. It is not prudence. True. But if we will insist upon calling it prudence, we cover up its hideous deformity, we hide its repulsive nature, and we represent it as a positive virtue. Then, under that guise, we do not hesitate to cultivate and practise it. Instances of self-deception are constantly thrusting themselves under our notice. What are we, for example, to

think of a lady who laments in agonizing tones that she really can not afford ten shillings for some starving orphans or destitute children, when we find her a day or two later offering ten guineas in the advertising columns of the *Morning Post* for the recovery of her lost cat or stolen poodle? Or how shall we fittingly describe a wealthy nobleman whose family claims make it quite impossible for him to send a five pound note to a struggling mission, but who can, nevertheless, afford to bet five hundred pounds on a losing race horse?

This system of self-deception pursues us through life, and affects all our relations with the supernatural. Even the most sacred duties are often neglected on account of it; and yet we fail to see through the cunning of the devil, who deceives us. Consider, for instance, the duty of receiving Holy Communion, the greatest of the sacraments, in which Our Lord Himself comes to strengthen our weakness, and to help us by His powerful grace to overcome concupiscence and to vanquish all the enemies of our salvation. The very great importance of this sacrament is reason enough to induce the Evil

One to do all he can to prevent our making use of it. Yet he is far too astute to hint that it is a bad thing to approach the Holy Table. Oh, dear; no! He is much too diplomatic. He declares it to be a most excellent practice, at least in the abstract. He merely throws out doubts as to whether *we*, with our delicate chest, or with our tendency to bronchitis or asthma, ought to go. He demands, quite casually of course, whether it is "not just a little risky, especially on these cold, raw mornings, to go out fasting." He becomes so very, very solicitous for our health, and would persuade us that we are far too delicate to expose ourselves to catching cold. Perhaps he even recalls to our minds how our medical adviser warned us that we should be more careful, and never leave the house until we had reinforced ourselves by at least a cup of tea and a slice of bread and butter. He may even add that "good people are scarce," and that "prudence is the better part of valor."

And thus, without alarming us, or creating so much as a suspicion of his perfidy, or uttering even one syllable

directly against Communion, which we might resent, he succeeds, all the same, in keeping us from the sacrament. We postpone our Communions till the weather grows warmer and more settled. Weeks develop into months, and what is the consequence? Well! We have deprived ourselves of great graces; we have acquired a habit of postponing our Communions; we come to think less highly of this gift of God; and the end aimed at by the devil is secured quite as fully as if the penal laws against Communion were still in full force.

The fallacy of the whole argument, and the measure in which we deceive ourselves, are made manifest by a glance at our conduct in purely worldly matters. Thus, how very often it happens that, though we are too delicate to breathe the morning air, we are not too delicate to go out to late dinners or parties, and to come home in the dead of night through the cold, damp atmosphere of the reeking streets! Or we can pass the night in a hot, stuffy ballroom, and dance till the day is dawning, and can then expose ourselves to the inclemency of the weather, on our way home, in the

early hours, without any one taking us to task for our imprudence. The plain fact is that where ecclesiastical observances and religious duties are concerned, we are influenced and swayed by arguments which are summarily dismissed as utterly trivial and baseless when directed against our pleasures and amusements. In thousands of similar ways we allow ourselves to be cajoled, to our great spiritual hurt. Among so many other instances that suggest themselves, it is difficult to make a selection. Perhaps the question of reading may serve our purpose.

As we are well aware, the book-market is flooded to overflowing with a most varied assortment of literature. There are good books in abundance, but there is also an enormous and ever-increasing assortment of worthless books,—books vicious and demoralizing in tendency, and corrupt and depraved in tone; together with tales and stories which are sensuous and immoral, and sometimes obscene. There is nothing useful or really instructive in the class of publications to which I am now referring. They are full of hidden dangers, unbecoming con-

versations, suggestive dialogues between imaginary persons of opposite sexes, of impossible love scenes, and situations of a compromising character, which, even if they do not defile the heart and excite the passions, at all events fill the imagination with impure images and forms, and familiarize the mind with every sort of horror and abomination. There is, of course, a vast difference between one book and another, but it is not too much to say that some of the romances of the present day are such that any really good Catholic would feel bound to leave them severely alone. He can not read them without exposing himself to dangerous temptation.

Will the world advise the purchase of such scandalous works? Will it openly counsel their perusal? Certainly not. At least, it is far too tactful to express itself in that blunt way; for some of us might resent it. Besides, it may accomplish its evil purpose yet more effectively in another manner; by inquiring, for instance, quite innocently: "Oh, by the way, have you seen So and So's last delightfully naughty book?"—"No?"—"Oh, how very odd!

Why, everybody is talking about it. And it is so very awkward, don't you know, not to be able to join in the conversation! One looks so foolish when one knows nothing about what is on everybody's lips. Do you say one ought not to read it? Oh, nonsense! It can't be so bad as all that. We are no longer children; and surely we can not be expected, in these days, to live with our head in a well, and to be ignorant of all that is passing around. As well become a recluse altogether, and live on beans in a hermitage," and so forth. And we, gentle readers, alas! are influenced by such banter. Thus, without appearing to approve in the least degree of immoral or infidel books, the devil, nevertheless, manages to get his own way. We read them on some worldly and wholly inadequate pretext; but we read them all the same, and irreparable harm is done. In one word, we are constantly being deluded by those who "put light for darkness, and darkness for light." How many a silly worldling, when he comes to be judged, will find nothing better to say in his defence than to repeat the words of his mother Eve: *Serpens*

decepit me—"The serpent deceived me"!*

It is the same everywhere. How often, to take a somewhat different illustration, indecent pictures and statuary are displayed in drawing-rooms, and in halls of public buildings and even of private houses, on the ground that they administer to æsthetical taste and promote a love of art! I do not wish to imply that every statue or painting is indecent merely because it is undraped; but I am referring to genuinely indecent and suggestive representations, whether draped or not. They are a source of much temptation, and often do a great deal of harm; yet they are retained, and left exposed to every eye, on the plea of their artistic merits, and because they are thought to reveal the talents and the genius of some famous wielder of the brush or the chisel. The devil eases the consciences of such exhibitors by laying all the stress on plausible motives, and by closing their eyes to the evil; for, provided he can introduce the poison of sin into our minds, he cares little about the nature of the spoon with which he administers the deadly draught.

* Gen., iii, 13.

Innumerable other instances might be mentioned, but I have probably presented a sufficient variety to illustrate my theme, and to enable the thoughtful reader to realize the special danger which, at the present day, besets us from this source. It may be well to remark that the present age is an age of deceit. Fraud is practised everywhere. Traders and merchants and sellers do not scruple to deceive their customers, when they judge they can do so with impunity. The *Chamber of Commerce Journal* (April, 1907) informs us that "needles made in Germany and Austria are imported into France, and marked 'Redditch.' English hosiery is imitated in Germany and sent to America and other countries, marked as British goods. Linen made on the Continent is labelled as Irish linen, and sold in Egypt and other places." In fact, goods of all kinds are offered to the public under false names, to make them sell. Chalk is put in the milk, sand in the sugar, and water in the wine. Paste is passed off for diamonds, shoddy for leather, and cotton for wool. We have lying advertisements, misleading prospectuses, and quack medicines. Every purchaser is

afraid of being cheated; and in matters of business, commerce, and exchange, a brother can scarcely trust a brother.

This spirit of deception penetrates everywhere, not excepting the supernatural. It affects the minds of unthinking Catholics, even as regards their highest spiritual interests, and their duty to God. They grow lax and fall away into easy and negligent ways, simply because they do not, or will not, see things as they really are. They so dress up and disguise evil that they mistake it for good, and call light darkness and darkness light, and deliberately live in an atmosphere of untruth.

The remedy consists in courageously throwing off the mask of deception which evil still wears, and in beginning at once to call things by their rightful names. Let men learn above all things to know themselves, and to read their own characters aright; and then they will at least understand what is wrong and defective, and what it is precisely that they have to struggle against and overcome. So long as they insist on describing "cheating" as a trick of the trade, and "avarice" as a

form of thrift, and "pride" as firmness, and "insolence" as courage, and speak similarly of all the other forms of human weakness and wickedness, they do but canonize vice and connive at evil. And unless that habit it reformed but little amendment can be expected.

Let us, then, arouse ourselves, "knowing that it is now the hour for us to rise from sleep. . . The night is passed and the day is at hand. Let us, therefore, cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day";* and no longer "call evil good, and good evil; nor put darkness for light, nor light for darkness; nor bitter for sweet, nor sweet for bitter."

* Rom., xiii, 11-13.

IV.

The Inordinate Love of Money.

I.

Iron was his chest,
  Iron was his door,
His hand was iron,
  And his heart was more.

Opes animi irritamen avari.—*Ovid.*

IN all ages of the world's history, riches have proved a stumbling-block and a snare. Yet never, perhaps, was the thirst for gold so insatiable, or so widely diffused among all ranks, as at the present day. The example of hundreds who have amassed colossal fortunes in a few years, and the continual comments of a ubiquitous press upon the doings and sayings of the many millionaires and multi-millionaires, who scarcely know what to do with their enormous incomes, have sown the seeds of discontent in the hearts of the multitudes, and filled them with a feverish desire to emulate their example. With this end in view, they struggle and strive with all their might and main, and often display an energy and a dogged

perseverance worthy of a nobler cause. Indeed, money-making not unfrequently becomes the one supreme aim and the one all-ruling ambition of their lives,—their idol and their god.

Two circumstances have especially contributed, in latter years, to give impetus to this sordid passion. The first is a general decline of faith, and a consequent disregard and forgetfulness of the far higher and nobler ends of religion, now alas! supplanted by ignobler and more material ends; and the second is the fact that so much more may now be purchased by riches than formerly. The world has been advancing with rapid strides. Recent inventions and discoveries have placed upon the market a thousand new sources of pleasure and gratification, which excited no desires a few centuries ago, because their very existence was never thought of or imagined. Not only has every want known to our ancestors been fully supplied, but innumerable fresh appetites have been developed, such as the appetite for foreign travel, for motoring, for new forms of luxury and dissipation, and so forth,—the full gratification of which depends

upon the amount of a man's income and the sums he is able to disburse.

A gigantic fortune places at our feet the world and almost all it contains. We can utilize all its conveniences, we can enter into all its pleasures. In food and clothing and lodging, and in much else, we are in a position to select what we like best, and what is most to our taste, without paying any attention to those prudential considerations that limit and hamper the struggling poor, who, even with the greatest economy, can scarcely purchase the bare necessities of life.

Whether at home or abroad, whether on land or sea, whether resting or travelling, sleeping or waking, money will always procure us many comforts that can be had by no other means. And if money can, in very truth, render us many valuable services, our imagination exaggerates its powers still further, and is ever ready to attribute to it an omnipotence and an influence far in excess of the reality. In our ignorance, we are apt to regard it as a magic wand whose mere possession will enable us to hold sway over persons as well as things, and to do pretty well

as we wish. Money holds out the prospect of endless delights, which look feasible enough from a distance, and which only a nearer view shows to be unattainable. But these fair promises, even though they are destined never to be realized, serve, all the same, to stimulate our greed, to excite our cupidity, and to drive spurs into the sides of our intent. Once the fever takes possession of us, we are scarcely masters of ourselves, and push on in thoughtless pursuit, scarcely pausing to reflect that what seems the road to material prosperity may easily prove to be the road to spiritual destitution.

That riches constitute a real menace to our salvation is proved by a hundred passages from Holy Scripture. Our Lord, who is the Eternal Truth, tells us that "a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven"; that it is, in fact, "easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle" than for a man of wealth to be saved.* The same doctrine is found running through the texts of the Old Testament. "Gold and silver hath destroyed many," says the Wise Man,

* St. Matt., xix, 23, 24.

"and hath reached even the heart of kings and perverted them."* And again: "If thou be rich, thou shalt not be free from sin."† And: "There is not a more wicked thing than to love money; for such a one setteth even his own soul for sale."‡

The dangers to our salvation arising from an inordinate love of money are of two kinds. The one set are connected with the pursuit of wealth, the other with its actual possession. Regarding the first, we shall do well to weigh thoughtfully the following inspired words of St. Paul: "They who would become rich fall into temptation and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For covetousness is the root of all evils, which some desiring, have erred from the faith, and have entangled themselves in many sorrows."§

These are indeed terrifying words, and deserving of our most careful attention. To realize their full import, we must consider the natural character and disposition

* Eccles., viii, 3. † Ibid., xi, 10.

‡ Ibid., x, 10. § I Tim., vi, 9, 10.

of man, and the mould in which he has been formed. His mind and his affections are essentially limited. Hence it is quite impossible that he should direct the whole current of his will and intelligence to the consideration of one object without withdrawing it from the consideration of every other, however important. The more he concentrates his energy in one direction, the less he will have left to throw in any other. Hence, to be absorbed and filled by one all-mastering resolve means to pay little or no attention to anything else.

Now, there is scarcely anything in the whole world so fascinating and so exciting, as the hunting after gold. Once a man has been inoculated with this virus he is no longer master of himself. It awakens within him an interest and a thirst that drive him on, almost against his will. Should he meet with any success, and should he find that his credit account at the bank is mounting up, it is all the worse; for this knowledge stirs him up to increased exertions. It sets all his faculties at full tension, as the sight of the fox in the hunting field sets all the hounds and huntsmen in hot pursuit.

It is generally found that a man's appetite grows with his gains. The mere prospect of acquiring a vaster fortune and wider estates, and the comforts and the influence that flow therefrom, is apt to absorb his thoughts and to diminish every other interest. The desire to heap up riches soon surpasses and eclipses every other desire, and puts to flight all greater, purer, and nobler ambitions. At last his thoughts become so centred and focussed upon material gains that he loses all sense of spiritual and supernatural things. His mind fixes itself on the actualities of the hour, and on those opportunities which offer themselves only at intervals, and which must be watched, and seized so soon as they rise, and which he feels he can not afford to lose. For he knows the harvest must be gathered in at once, if at all. The result is he has no time to bestow upon more vital matters, not even on such as relate to his immortal soul. Soon this eager, anxious pursuit of gold develops into a passion,—often the one ruling passion of his life.

How can such a person pray or meditate, or peacefully turn his thoughts to God,

or muse on heavenly things? How can he set aside distractions, and kneel down morning and evening to recollect himself, in calm faith and humility, before the presence of Him who fills both heaven and earth with the majesty of His glory? His brain is seething; his heart beats with nervous anxiety; his thoughts are never in repose. His mind is occupied with bonds and mortgages, and interests and dividends, and securities and scripts, and speculations and bank accounts, and the fluctuations of the Stock Exchange, and a thousand other things related to the acquirement of wealth.

This is all very well from a purely worldly point of view; but the truth remains that, while he is gathering all the powers of his body and his soul, and marshalling them together, to aid him in raking in the gold, his spiritual interests are bound to suffer irreparable loss. "No man," Christ declares, "can serve two masters. You can not serve God and mammon." And this is shown by experience. Unless some restraint be placed on a man's appetite for wealth, it will lead him, first, into a disregard of the practices

of piety, then to a sad neglect of his duty toward God, and finally to a general state of religious indifference and apathy.

Upon this follow yet more disastrous consequences. As his thirst increases—and it is generally whetted by every success, as a lion's thirst grows more uncontrollable each time it has tasted human blood,—the aspirant after riches grows less scrupulous as to the methods he employs to secure his end. When opportunities of gain present themselves, he stays not to inquire too nicely into the legitimacy of the means; if doubts arise, he immediately brushes them aside, and will justify the "shadiest" proceedings on the plea of custom, or of the example of others whose consciences have grown less timorous than even his own. By degrees he becomes more hardened. Finally he throws off all restraint, and stoops to any piece of trickery and chicanery and to any underhand scheme that seems likely to serve his purpose. He will take a mean advantage of the simple and the confiding, and will calmly allow the orphan and the widow to be drained of

their little savings, provided only that he be the gainer. He may even start bogus companies, and issue false bonds, and spread abroad misleading prospectuses, and descend to other shameful expedients, to induce honest and unsuspecting laborers and men of small fortune to sink their hard-earned gains in mines or railways or exploration schemes, and other enterprises, so cleverly devised and so cunningly manipulated, that he may manage to reap the harvest which his lying tongue has caused them to sow.

It is appalling to note how invertebrate and elastic grows the conscience of a speculator intent on making money. By disregarding its dictates in small matters, and by silencing it with sophistical arguments in great ones, it seems to lose its very power of utterance. Its voice grows less imperious and audible day by day, till at last it becomes as useless, for all practical purposes, as the voice of one crying in the wilderness, a voice and nothing more.

Alas! there is no doubt that temptations to all kinds of evil practices beset the path of the would-be rich; and so

great is the inclination to avail themselves of even dishonest means, that very few seem to possess enough moral courage to offer successful resistance for any length of time, especially where the advantages are considerable, and the chances of detection are remote and improbable. Men who are constantly looking out for opportunities of advancing their pecuniary interests find plenty that are disreputable and dishonest, and can seldom make up their minds to pass them by. Too often it is the opportunity that corrupts and blights the strongest virtue. "How oft the chance to do ill deeds makes ill deeds done!"

But dishonesty, injustice, and unlawful practices form only a small fraction of the evils that follow in the train of the avaricious. In addition to these, the insatiable thirst for gold is calculated to dry up that fountain within the heart from which flows all that is noblest and best in a man's nature. It causes him to be far more concerned about what he has than about what he is. It leads him by degrees to imagine that external goods and costly and precious surroundings can add some-

thing to his own intrinsic worth. He takes delight in earthly rather than in heavenly treasures, and sets an altogether fictitious value on worldly objects that administer to his bodily ease and comfort. In a word, he becomes earthly and sordid in all his tastes.

All these effects come to pass the more readily because poor sinful man is, by nature, more inclined to cherish what he can see and handle than what is invisible and impervious to the senses. He is, in fact, a creature of sense. He depends upon sense for almost everything. Not only does his knowledge of this world come to him through the senses, but he is dependent upon sense, at least as a vehicle, for his knowledge even of the next. Does not St. Paul tell us that "faith comes by hearing"? And does not St. Thomas Aquinas teach that even God Himself is known through material things; for, "though He exceeds all sensible things and sense itself, yet His effects, *from which we prove His existence, are sensible*."*

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* C. G. i. 1, c. 12.

The truth is, man is so immersed in sense and so domineered by it, that he is disposed to rest in sense, to seek his happiness, his pleasure, his delights and his recreation in the exercise of sense, and to exclude from his thoughts all consideration of the spiritual and the supersensible. If he obeys this tendency instead of resisting it, the consequences will be most disastrous. He will hesitate to sacrifice the present for the sake of the future, and the visible for the invisible. Not only will he refuse to do himself violence to secure heaven and the eternal possession of God, but he will grow so attached to what is earthly and temporal as to deem time that is spent upon anything else wasted and lost. Well may the Apostle say that such persons sometimes end by "erring from the faith."

II.

But if the mere pursuit of wealth is fraught with so many dangers, its actual possession is equally to be feared; and the reasons are obvious to any one who will pause to reflect. In the first

place, wealth and wide possessions tend to foster that spirit of pride which, in a greater or lesser measure, is the inheritance of every man. They invest a person with a fictitious importance, not only in his own eyes but in the eyes of others also. God, indeed, looks into the heart and searches its most secret recesses, but man regards only the exterior. The consequence is that one who is waited on by servants and retainers, who lives in a sumptuous palace, who travels about in costly carriages, who is clothed in luxurious apparel, and who exercises a wide-felt authority, too often comes to be regarded as a superior being. He is scarcely thought to belong to the same race as the toiling, moiling multitudes who live in dingy hovels, and who eke out a miserable existence with the uncertain labor of their hands. The honor and flattery that is offered to him he accepts as a right; and *his* comfort and happiness is considered of much greater importance than that of any of his dependents. He breathes a different atmosphere and lives in another world. His society is sought after, his acquaintance is valued; and when he goes abroad, women bow low and

men take off their hats. All classes vie with one another to show him honor and respect. Men of rank are proud to claim him as a friend; tradesmen seek his patronage with servile obsequiousness; while the impecunious flatter him with honied words, in the hope of receiving something of his bounty. He attracts about him sycophants and soft-tongued followers, who expect to profit by his favor, and who dread to incur his displeasure. Never does he hear the naked, unvarnished truth about himself; yet he listens with pleasure to the most fulsome compliments, accepts adulation as his due, and lives habitually in a region of falsehood and unreality.

This, of itself, is a most hazardous position to occupy. It will inflict grave injury on his soul, unlesss he possess real humility, and sufficient self-knowledge to see through the falsity, and to weigh himself in the balance of the sanctuary.

Great wealth is a source of much danger also, because it affords endless opportunities of self-indulgence, and provides, ready to hand, exceptional facilities for

gratifying every passion and for committing every crime. The great masses of the industrious poor, laboring for their daily bread, enjoy scanty leisure. They have but little acquaintance with that idleness which "hath taught much evil."* They must be up and doing, and can not afford to fritter away time in sloth and slumber; and Our Lord warns us that 'it is *while men sleep* that their enemy comes and oversows cockle among the wheat.'† Work—especially work that is imposed by the very necessities of our position, and that must be got through, if bread is to be won, and the wolf kept from the door—is a powerful bulwark against that tumultuous sea of temptations that besets the indolent rich. The laborer who is guiding the plow through the furrow, or working a complicated piece of machinery, or making up accounts, has something else to do than to be hatching plots and devising vain things.

On the other hand, a rich man who has much leisure and no studious habits, and who cares not to apply himself to any trade or profession, is in a very different

* Ecclus., xxxiii., 29. † St. Matt., xiii, 25.

position, and falls an easy prey to the tempter. Should he be swayed by any unlawful passion, the means of satisfying it are within easy reach. Should he desire to vent his spite or jealousy or vindictiveness, he possesses power enough to do so. If vanity or ostentation be his weakness, he may indulge both the one and the other to his heart's content; or if he be rather a slave to gluttony and to a too great fondness for the delicacies of the table, his wealth enables him to procure the rarest viands and the most recherché wines. If ambition and a desire to attain fame and notoriety urge him on, he has wealth enough to purchase the assistance of others, and can bribe and promise, and so avail himself of the talents and the brains of the hungry thousands, who are venal enough to become his mercenaries. Not only can the impure secure victims to sacrifice on the altar of their lusts, but even the would-be murderer, who is afraid to redden his own hands in the blood of another, may often find scoundrels base enough to accomplish his purpose, if only he chooses to make it worth their while. In short, there is scarcely an evil desire

or a base passion of any kind the indulgence of which is not rendered easier and readier by the presence of wealth. As England's greatest poet says: "If gold go first, then all ways lie open."

This statement might be illustrated from many a page of bygone history; but we must refrain from lingering any longer upon this point, as so many others claim our attention. One of these, is the circumstance that riches are apt to entangle their owners in many spiritual difficulties, from which only the truly conscientious can escape with any success. Great wealth means great responsibility. God demands a rigid account of the gifts He confers, whether they be natural or supernatural, physical or intellectual. "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required."

A man of great fortune, who occupies a prominent position in the world, and is looked up to by servants, tenants and dependents, will have to render to the Supreme Judge a very different account from that of the multitudes who earn their bread by the sweat of their brows, and live lives comparatively hidden and unknown.

Even if such obscure members of society should, in some cases, misbehave and act in a disreputable manner, their evil example is observed by few; and even when noticed, attracts few imitators. This can not be said of the man of wealth. He is raised above the ordinary level of the masses. He stands on a kind of pedestal. He is a spectacle to all eyes, and the observed of all observers. His life is, to a large extent, a public life. His deeds and his sayings are before the world. They are chronicled in the daily press, and rumor is ever busy with his name.

If he acts his part nobly, he will be an immense power for good; if not, he will be an immense power for evil. If he is conspicuous for his justice and honesty in dealing with others; if he is known to scorn to do an ignoble deed; if he proves himself to be a loving son, a faithful husband, a devoted father, a loyal citizen, a stanch friend—true to his country, his Church, and his God,—he is not merely honored and respected by all whose approval is worth having, but he becomes a leader even without being conscious of it. Men instinctively admire him. They

are moved by his presence; they are swayed by his example; they are sensibly impressed by the dignity and nobility of his bearing; they recognize him as one of Nature's true gentlemen, who has learned the great art of mastering himself, of ruling his passions, and of subduing all his evil inclinations. His strong personality exercises a powerful influence over all who know him. It is a constant reproach to such as are following a loose and dissolute career, and a perpetual encouragement to such as are aiming at virtue and truth. His life, in a word, serves as an object-lesson from which they are constantly drawing valuable deductions. It seems to beckon them upward and onward, it stimulates their better feelings, it plants in their own hearts the seeds of a nobler ambition, and enkindles the flames of higher aspirations.

But a bad man in a high position exercises an influence which is diametrically the reverse of all this. Such a one may truly be said to enter into partnership with the devil himself. Whether consciously or unconsciously, he acts as the decoy of the Evil One, and becomes a destroyer of souls,

than which nothing is more abominable. His example lends a sanction to the evil deeds of others; it encourages them in their nefarious designs; it strengthens their crooked wills, and serves to hasten their steps along the downward path that can end only in the abyss.

Indeed, there is something peculiarly contagious about evil. It spreads like a disease, and contaminates thousands. As a single rotten apple, if suffered to remain, will convey the germs of rottenness to every other that comes in contact with it, so will one bad character, especially if he be wealthy and powerful, injure and demoralize all who are dependent upon him, or who associate with him. So far from turning to good account the talents entrusted to him by God, he altogether fails to recognize his responsibilities, and employs those talents to waste, to devastate and to destroy.

Terrible beyond expression will be the account to be rendered one day to the infinite Judge, since He will punish us not only for the offences of which we ourselves have been guilty, but also for the sins of others to which we have been accessory,

or which we have encouraged or occasioned by our own scandalous conduct. Should others be condemned eternally because of crimes of which we have been the instigators and the chief cause, it will go hard with us in the latter day, when God will judge each one according to his works. "Woe to the world because of scandals!"* exclaims Our Lord. These words sound alarming enough: but more terrible by far are those that follow: "Whosoever shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the sea."†

Other obstacles which piety and holiness encounter in wealth are the many cares and anxieties to which it gives birth. The mere administration of a large property is a grievous burden and a constant trouble. If a man, besides being rich, is also a man of business and superintends everything himself, he soon discovers that this runs away with a great portion of his time, and keeps him preoccupied, distracted, and little disposed to spiritual

* St. Matt., xviii, 7. † St. Mark, ix, 41,

contemplation. If, on the contrary, he employs agents and underlings to do this necessary work for him, his position is very little improved; for he never really knows how far they have his interests at heart, or how things are being managed or mismanaged, or whether he is being cheated or deceived instead of being honestly served. And thus he is ever anxious and ill at ease. In short, whatever way we look at it, we are forced to admit that a man with so many interests and cares tugging at his heart-strings can scarcely give to divine things the same calm, thoughtful attention that can be given by one free from such responsibilities.

But it may be objected: If money is such a worry, why do men so cling to it? The answer is because they think chiefly of the pleasures that are associated with it, and not of the cares; they contemplate the roses and not the thorns, though the thorns remain to prick and harass long after the roses have withered away. And this at once suggests another obstacle that wealth puts in the path of the rich. It leads them, little by little, to seek their happiness in the present rather than in

the future, and causes them to forget that this earth is but a place of pilgrimage and a valley of tears, and that, as the Apostle says, "we have not here a lasting city."

Man is in very truth made to be happy. God has created him with capacities for enjoyment so vast that we can not measure them. This is evident from the fact that He has created him for Himself. Man's supreme beatitude is to know, love, and possess God for evermore. And because such is his high destiny, he finds within himself a natural thirst for happiness. He is fully conscious of the feeling, even when he knows not whence it comes or whereof 'tis born. All desire happiness, all seek it, all are strongly attracted by it; but very few know where to find it or even to look for it, and least of all those who spend their days in affluence and ease. Money supplies so many other wants that they fancy it will supply this also. The consequence is they use their wealth to purchase, first one coveted object, and then another; they surround themselves with every bodily comfort, and deny themselves no delight that lies within reach. They build themselves

lordly mansions, they fill them with the costliest furniture and the finest works of art; they clothe and adorn their poor perishable bodies with the finest products of every country; make a study of the culinary art, and eat and drink as though eating and drinking were the chief, if not the whole, duty of man. In short they seek to make their heaven here below, and so fix their affections upon this world that they have no appetite for anything higher or more spiritual. The disastrous effects of this may be easily gauged by any one who considers man's composite nature, and the dangerous consequences of indulging one part at the expense of the other.

Man is made up of spirit and body, and his real and true happiness, even in this life, depends upon the due subordination of the lower to the higher. The freer the mind is left to exercise its noblest faculties, the more easily it can soar above material and perishable things; and the less it is oppressed by the body, the greater become its chances of happiness. Man's fleshy envelope is far from being the whole of man. It is not even his

noblest part: it is but a menial and a servant, and should be treated as such. Those who treat it otherwise learn in time to mourn over their folly. Even were it possible to render the body perfect in every organ and sound in every limb, that of itself would be incapable of bringing any real content. Why? Because it leaves man's chief part, the soul, untouched. Bodily health can not restore peace to an evil conscience, or bring hope to one in despair. It has no power, as the poet says, to "minister to a mind diseased," or to "pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow."

Utterly does he fail to touch the real source of the evil, who touches not the soul. Man's true happiness is in the mind; consequently, to attempt to create a state of happiness by multiplying physical pleasures, would be as idle as to seek to cure a cancer, by merely hiding it under a silken bandage. Money has power over only what is material and earthly, like itself. It may effect a change in the outward appearance of things; it may make a display which will excite the envy of others; it may multiply costly objects

about and around us; but all such remedies are futile and incapable of affecting the soul itself, which will suffer and starve and waste away amid the greatest material abundance, as a lion will die of want even in a granary bursting with corn.

To realize this is given to few. The vast majority are foolish enough to imagine that they can heal a wound which is purely spiritual by applications which are purely material. They have not correctly diagnosed their complaint; so that, instead of having recourse to the true remedy, they waste their time in multiplying useless prescriptions. The heaven on earth, upon which they have set their hearts, is never reached, for it has no existence; yet in pursuing this false end they forfeit their true end, and wantonly sacrifice the substance for the sake of the shadow.

Another distemper that riches breed is selfishness and a want of sympathy for others. It is a melancholy truth that one who has all that his heart desires, and who has never known the agony of want, and the thousand and one sorrows and privations that fall to the share of the poor, seldom forms any idea of the bitterness

of their lot. From want of personal experience, he has not learned how to compassionate his brethren in distress. Having all that he requires, and indeed far more than he really needs, he troubles himself little about any one else. Like Dives in the Gospel, he himself is well clothed and fed, and is too much taken up with his own comforts to look with anything but contemptuous indifference at Lazarus, the poor beggar, who lies perishing for want at his door. He utterly forgets that the rich are but the stewards and agents of God; that wealth which is misapplied or devoted to sinful purposes can yield to its owner nothing but misfortune; that generosity and a large-handed charity should characterize those whom Providence has placed in easy circumstances; and that, while the poor are to win heaven by their forbearance and patience and resignation, under their many trials and tribulations, the rich are to win the same end by the generosity of their alms.

From the foregoing considerations it is clear that wealth, both in the getting and in the possessing, is attended by many dangers; and that the path of the pros-

perous is beset with countless difficulties. By God's grace, they may, of course, be overcome, and even turned to good account. We have before us, even at the present day, many splendid examples of men as rich in virtue as in gold, whose noble souls are proof against all the seductions to which we have referred,—men who make an excellent use of their vast incomes, and who, by conquering covetousness, have raised themselves to exceptional heights of virtue. But such cases are exceptions, not the rule. Whether the difficulties are overcome or not, the fact remains: riches, in themselves, constitute a grave danger and a continuous temptation, against which we must needs be ever upon our guard: "There is not a more wicked thing than to love money." Further, it may be observed, in conclusion, that there is very little of *real worth* to be obtained by gold.

To purchase heaven, has gold the power?
Can gold remove the mortal hour?
In life, can love be bought with gold?
Are friendship's pleasures to be sold?
No! All that's worth a wish, a thought,
Fair virtue gives, unbrib'd, unbought.
Cease, then, on trash thy hopes to bind.
Let nobler views engage thy mind.*

* Dr. Johnson.

V.

Indiscriminate Reading.

We find wit in poetry; in philosophy, profoundness; in mathematics, acuteness; in history, wonder of events; in oratory, sweet eloquence; in divinity, supernatural light and devotion, as so many rich metals in their proper mines.—*Bishop Hall.*

I grieve to know that, on the tables in families and homes where the Name of God is honored, there lie books which ought to be burned—ay, and burned with the marks of public infamy; burned not simply that they may disappear in smoke, but that they may be gibbeted and condemned by the detestation of all pure-minded men and women.—*Henry E. Cardinal Manning.*

IN bygone years, when the population of the world was comparatively small, the vast majority of men were satisfied to communicate with one another by word of mouth. It is true that some few, here and there, who could wield the pen, would set their thoughts down on paper; but not one person in a hundred could have interpreted their calligraphy, however fairly done, since the art of reading, like the art of writing, was an accomplishment confined almost entirely to the leisured and the learned. The means of communication, not only between country and country,

but even between town and town in the same country, were difficult and uncertain, and exceedingly slow. Of course there was no post; and as the usual system, when important announcements had to be made, was to dispatch a special messenger, on foot or on horseback, it was generally left to him to convey the news and to express the message in his own rude way. It is not surprising, then, that epistolary correspondence should have been somewhat at a discount.

Gradually, as greater facilities of getting about from place to place were afforded, and as more serviceable roads and more reliable coaches, running between given places at stated intervals, were put at the disposal of the general public, letter writing became more feasible, and consequently much more popular also. Friends began to keep up a more or less regular correspondence with one another, and thus the "news-sheet"—the forerunner of our daily paper—came into existence. Still, there was no strong incentive to literary work.

But time wore on. Mankind kept multiplying all over the land. Hundreds

became thousands, thousands grew into millions, and into tens and hundreds of millions. At last, with the constant increase of population, there arose an urgent need, such as had never been felt before, of a more perfect, a more expeditious, and a more general system for the diffusion of thought. This need was felt in every quarter, and various unsuccessful attempts were made to meet it. Finally, after many futile efforts and impracticable experiments had been repeated throughout a period extending over several generations, the foundations of the present art of printing were securely laid. Once the discovery had been made, it grew rapidly, and became more and more developed and improved, until now, aided by the thousand mechanical contrivances of the day, it has attained a degree of perfection that has far exceeded all expectation, and leaves little more to be desired.

In our own time the printing press does its work more rapidly, more accurately, and more beautifully than it ever did before. It multiplies copies of books, periodicals, and papers at a rate that seems almost magical; and is thus able

without difficulty and in an incredibly short time, to place an author's thoughts and sentiments within reach of millions of readers. Day by day, in all parts of the world, it is turning out an inexhaustible stream of literature of one kind or another. It creates a river broad and deep, with endless tributaries that never cease to flow, and that percolate into every nook and corner of the civilized world. In brief, from a mere nothing it has grown into a stupendous power that is ever influencing the world, and shaping and moulding the opinions of men,—perhaps, indeed, to a much greater extent than is generally realized. For while, on the one hand, persons of all conditions and walks of life now read, and read much, on the other hand, extremely few ever pause to reflect and inwardly digest the mass of matter that is set before them. Either they have not the time, amid all the hurry and bustle of life; or, if they have the time, they have not the desire or the inclination so to exert themselves; or should neither time nor inclination be wanting, then they lack the requisite aptitude and capacity, and find

it simpler and easier to let others do their thinking for them, just as they let others build their houses and cook their food. As a result, the opinions, views, judgments and thoughts of the world are colored to a considerable extent by the literature of the day, more especially by the ephemeral literature; and that, as we all know, is extremely heterogeneous. It is a strange mixture of good and bad and indifferent; and includes, in ever-varying proportions, the useful, the useless, and the downright pernicious.

To read or even to take note of everything that comes from the press has long since become an impossibility. We are constrained, from the very nature of the case, to make some sort of selection. But how? What principles should guide us? There is no doubt that we should choose our books with the same care and on the same principles with which we choose our friends and companions. In fact, a book or a paper is a friend. The volume between our hands speaks to us just as a friend does, oftentimes even with greater freedom and straightforwardness. It informs, it argues, it influences, per-

suades and entreats, in precisely the same manner. Nay, more: it can attract us to virtue or entice us to vice; counsel good or counsel evil; delight us by its breadth of view and nobleness or purpose, or shock us by its looseness of speech, its immorality, its profanity, or its vulgarity, just as the living voice.

We are commanded to avoid bad company, to fly from evil associates as from the fangs of a poisonous serpent, and to shun all occasions of sin. This obligation to keep out of harm's way, as we value our own soul, is consequently as stringent and as binding upon us in the matter of books as of persons. How could it be otherwise? For, though the press is a tremendously powerful engine, it is quite as much at the service of the wicked as of the good; and it would seem that in these days the wicked are even more ready and more zealous in availing themselves of it than are the good and the virtuous.

So soon as we allow ourselves to wander at will over the vast field of general literature, we find ourselves upon dangerous ground, so that great prudence as well as great self-restraint will be needed if we

are to thread our tortuous way without being contaminated and besmirched. The misfortune is that there is so much to attract us in what is evil. The mere knowledge that a fruit is forbidden is almost enough, of itself, to excite an immediate desire to taste it.* The secret drawer is always the one we are most anxious to pull open; and the hidden treasure, the treasure we deem best worth finding. Besides, error is apt to clothe itself in an attractive garb of novelty and freshness, which truth—constant, changeless, everlasting truth—can never wear. To every doubt and to every problem there can be but one sound and reliable answer, but the unsound and unreliable and false answers are innumerable. They are of all colors and complexions, and may be served up so as to suit any inquirer, however perverted his taste and jaundiced his judgment. Hence, a writer, whether of

* See Grou's "Interior Souls," p. 105.

This is so natural—so *unsuper*natural—that even *Punch* makes fun of it:

BOOKSELLER: What kind of a book do you wish, young lady?

MISS SWEETTHING: O please—ah—something one should not read, you know!

history or philosophy or religion, who has a purpose to serve and "an axe to grind," and who is insensible to the claims of truth, possesses for the alluring and misleading and cajoling of the unwary reader a thousand means which are not at the service of those who are ruled by higher principles.

While we rejoice greatly at the splendid opportunities afforded by modern inventions and mechanical appliances, we can not altogether close our eyes to the infamous purposes to which they are often prostituted. Cavilers and calumniators have taken a mean advantage of these extended facilities for circulating thought, so that we experience much difficulty in arriving at the truth even about our own age and country. It has been well said that "for one paper that fosters good feeling and good understanding between nations, by trying rightly to inform its neighbors, and to study them without reservations, many spread defamation and distrust. What unnatural and dangerous currents of opinion they set in motion, and for what false alarms and malicious interpretations of words and facts are they

responsible! . . . In politics, finance, business, even in science, religion, art and literature, there is everywhere disguise, trickery, and wire-pulling; one view for the public, another for the initiated."

The American-Spanish war, which many think as little honorable to the conquerors as to the conquered, is said to have been brought about by the influence of the so-called "yellow press," while some have ascribed the assassination of President McKinley to the same mischievous cause.

Mr. Georges Maze-Sencier assures us, in the *Correspondant*, that the present perturbed and fermented condition of French social and political life is due to the corruptions of the French newspapers. Editors pander to the blind passions of their readers; they arouse hatred and envy in the masses against the classes; they set forth in glowing colors anti-militarism, internationalism, and socialism, as remedies for poverty and inequality of fortune; while anti-clericalism is represented to be the sole method of escaping the so-called oppressions and exactions of the Church. The same writer affirms that it is the unscrupulous French papers that

are responsible for the agitation against the Church, which is threatening to drown France beneath an ocean of infidelity and irreligion.

"These journals," he writes, "propose to procure the eternal triumph of Liberty and Reason, in order to secure the complete destruction of the Church by a relentless anti-clerical crusade. By clericalism they mean what they affirm to be an indissoluble league between capitalists and clericals; for the capitalists, in order to carry on their dishonest transactions, have need of clericalism, which besots the brain of the masses by preaching resignation and obedience. With unwearied reiteration, one affirmation is being dinned into the ears of the French people by the French press—namely, that the Catholic Church, far from educating the people, far from serving the people's interests, far from having organized in the country an economic system that was not insupportable, kept the peasant and the workingman up to the time of the Revolution in the direst subjection, in utter degradation and want."

Similar statements might be made con-

cerning the influence of the press in other countries, but it is unnecessary to multiply instances. We have said sufficient for our purpose. But perhaps our note of warning will ring clearer and more effectively if, instead of speaking in generalities, we consider, under their respective headings, the specific sources of danger arising from the press, and deal with them one by one.

All books, magazines, papers, and other publications, fall under one of two heads: they are good or bad, innocent or harmful. With the good we are not now concerned, except it be to encourage their perusal as earnestly as possible. The bad, which it is to be feared are much the more numerous, may be conveniently divided into three categories. First come those which assail morals; secondly, those which assail divine Faith; and, thirdly, those which are simply frivolous and frothy,—by which we mean books which do not directly suggest or encourage evil, but which, nevertheless, waste our time, dissipate our minds, and occupy hours which might be much more profitably employed. We will speak of these first.

They consist for the most part of

silly novels and novelettes, and holiday sketches, and nonsense books, and of fantastic and extravagant tales, full of idle chatter and unilluminating dialogues between unreal persons; books which have nothing in them to arouse our better feelings, and whose heroes and heroines would never inspire us with a new idea, or add one iota to our stock of knowledge, even though they prattled on till the final crack of doom. These sentimental tales repeat, in a thousand different ways, the billings and the cooings of very commonplace persons in a very commonplace manner, unrelieved by any newness of thought, beauty of diction, or elegance of expression.

Unnumbered multitudes of these trashy narratives issue from the press every year. They exist because they supply an unfortunate demand. They are produced, like shilling razors or shoddy shoes, simply to sell. It is not even intended that they should convey any instruction or teach any lesson, but only that they should while away an hour or two, and help idle people to kill time. Most of them are vile compositions, born of an imagination that

has not yet learned to soar, and made up of incidents spun from the morbid conscience of some love-sick poetaster or maudlin sentimentalist.

There is no great harm in using such rubbish in moderation, and for purposes of simple recreation and relaxation of mind,—for we are not now supposing them to contain any suggestions contrary to faith or morals. The whole danger here lies in excess. And this danger undoubtedly exists. There are, indeed, persons without much vigor of mind, who find every intellectual effort fatiguing; these are apt to indulge too largely in writings whose sole recommendation is that they make no serious demand upon the attention of the reader, never moving him but carrying him along from chapter to chapter without any exertion of head or heart.

There are many persons in these days, more especially ladies, who consecrate far too much of their time to this form of amusement. They are to be found continually poring over some inane novel or foolish romance, wholly insensible of the positive harm they are doing themselves,—

a harm which is twofold. In the first place, valuable hours are squandered, and many important duties are in consequence either wholly neglected or else only hurriedly and imperfectly discharged. In the second place, a most undesirable and unhealthy craving for light, frothy reading is formed, a craving which soon unfits them for what is good, solid and serious. They impair their mental palate, and end by feeling as little hunger for instructive and profitable study as a schoolboy, who has accustomed himself to live on froth, soufflés, and whipped cream, feels for the ordinary strong meats of a healthy man.

The frittering away and the wasting of precious hours over foolish publications is not only deplorable in itself, but it is especially reprehensible in one who admits the tremendous responsibilities of life, who realizes that time once lost never returns, and who candidly confesses that for every misspent moment a strict account will one day have to be rendered.

To the next category of bad books belong all such as are directly immoral in themselves, or at least in their general tone and tendency. At the present day there

exists an entire department of literature which openly and unblushingly attacks the most sacred obligations of Christian marriage, and which wages an unholy war upon the most fundamental principles of family life. It does not hesitate to justify practices which God forbids, and to advocate and approve means and methods which lead to race-suicide and all the abominations that are connected with it. We refer to such practices as St. Paul denounces in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans, and which it seems to be the aim of certain degenerate authors to resuscitate and reinstate. Of these unsavory subjects we shall not speak, lest we should pollute our lips and offend the modesty of our readers. Nor is there any reason. They stand self-condemned, and no Catholic who respects himself would soil his fingers by touching a book that deals with them.

Non ragiamo di Lor';
Ma guarda e passa.

No! It is rather our purpose to put the reader on his guard against works which do not carry their own condemnation so clearly written on every page. We wish

to warn him against the dangers of certain works of fiction, whose main attraction consists in long and minute descriptions of the tender passion, which for many minds possess an extraordinary power of seduction. They present to us the love-sick maiden, who is, of course, always young and fair and interesting, and her faithful or unfaithful wooer, as the case may be. About their young lives is skilfully woven a tangled web of romance and poetry and fashion, which awakens our interest and kindles our imagination to the highest pitch of excitement. Then, as the plot slowly develops before our eyes, with all its varied incidents and surprises, various sentiments of sympathy or of resentment or of indignation or of anger take possession of us, and we waste our emotions and expend our strongest and noblest feelings on persons and sufferings which are as purely imaginary and unsubstantial as the creations of a dream.

In due course are represented the most harrowing scenes, in which unseemly dialogues are carried on, with the usual accessories of sighs and tears, and lovers' quarrels, and dramatic "asides," and

stage settings all complete. As we are hurried along from chapter to chapter, we are sometimes invited to contemplate the most indelicate, not to say suggestive, situations. Graphic descriptions of courting and coquetting and of illicit love-making, drawn in highly colored language, fill page after page; together with highly-spiced and even improper conversations, in which an evil art administers to the morbid curiosity and stirs up the worst passions of the reader. The presumptuous, who succumb to the low attractions of such literature, sink readily from bad to worse; they soon cease to be satisfied with the ordinary exhibitions of the affections and the attractions between the sexes, as they appear among decent people, and begin to thirst for what is more piquant and sensational, until at last they are not content unless they are wallowing in the filth and obscenity provided by the most licentious composers of the day. They speedily lose all sense of modesty, will revel in tales and anecdotes of a distinctly unsavory and highly objectionable character, and will greedily seize upon those revolting publications

of the hour in which all the ordinary laws of decorum and reticence are set aside, and where vice appears enthroned, naked, and unashamed.

An immense number of "shilling shockers" and "penny dreadfuls" flood the market, and find readers in abundance greedy and anxious to devour them. For there is very little of the spirit of denial in the world, and each one seems disposed to do "what seemeth good in his own eyes." Some will try to flatter themselves that they receive no harm from feeding on such garbage, but in this they do but prove their proficiency in the art of self-deception. Writings such as we refer to are exceedingly perilous. They are hotbeds of temptations, to which not even the strongest can expose himself with impunity. They arouse the passions, they heat the imagination and set it on fire, and conjure up a thousand impure and suggestive images before the mind,—those lascivious spectres which it is so immeasurably easier to call up than to lay. The least among the deplorable consequences that follow are that the heart is defiled, the senses are

stirred, and the whole soul is left troubled and ill at ease.

No one possessing any experience either as a confessor or as a director of souls will deny that an impure form or an indelicate situation, especially when it is artistically drawn, cleverly described, and vividly pictured in glowing words, will sometimes leave an impression on the incautious reader for a lifetime, and be a source of frequent trouble and regret to the end. It will obtrude itself upon his thoughts at the most inopportune moments, distract him at prayer and meditation, and challenge his powers of attention even when assisting at Mass, and receiving the Sacraments. Even so great a saint as St. Jerome, leading a penitential life in the desert, was haunted in spite of himself, by the sights and scenes he had witnessed years before, while residing in pagan Rome. If St. Paul, speaking under inspiration, distinctly tells us that such things should "not so much as be named among you, as becometh saints,"* what would he say of those Catholics who not merely name them, but who dwell intently upon them, and

* Eph., v, 3.

who do so deliberately and repeatedly and without even the shadow of a necessity? Surely so to act is to love the danger, and Our Lord declares that "he that loveth the danger shall perish in it."*

In addition to the evil consequences already referred to, such reading also familiarizes us with the image of sin and sensuality, and, by accustoming us to gaze upon every description of turpitude and immorality, gradually diminishes our appreciation of the hideousness and enormity of these crimes. It dulls the keen edge of conscience, and blinds us to the stern necessity of avoiding, at any sacrifice, such dangerous occasions of offending God.

But probably the greatest peril in the path of the omnivorous reader arises from infidel books. We mean all those publications in which the truths of Revelation and the doctrines of the Church, even the most sacred and sublime, are travestied or ridiculed, or directly attacked and contradicted. In these days it is downright infidelity, rather than hybrid Protestantism, that we have to contend

* Ecclus., iii, 27.

with. In fact, Protestantism is fast losing its hold on the great masses of the people. Its extreme Erastianism, its fatal contradictions, its internal divisions and dissensions, as well as its modern and purely human origin, are facts which are becoming daily more and more clearly recognized, and render it utterly unfit to cope with modern infidelity and to withstand the attacks of the inquiring and critical spirits of the twentieth century. Protestantism has had its day; it no longer satisfies any one whose mind is on the alert, so that thousands are now lapsing into total unbelief, and falling away from it, as leaves fall from a tree that is blasted and withering.

It is not so much heresy as downright atheism and godlessness that confront us, and that poison and contaminate so great a portion of the world's present literary output. There is not the slightest doubt that an incalculable amount of harm is being done by this class of books; and the more so because even good and pious persons often fail to appreciate the risk they run in perusing them. In fact, they will go so far as proudly and dis-

dainfully to deny that for *them* there is any risk whatsoever. Again and again Catholics may be heard asserting their right to read such pernicious authors. And on what pretext? "Oh," they jauntily exclaim, with an offended air, "if our Faith be true and well grounded, we have no cause to fear what men may allege against it!" Or they petulantly remark that the Catholic creed must be a very milk-and-water creed if it can not face the arguments of infidels and the onslaught of foes; that, in short, there can be nothing supernatural or divine in it, if it is going to totter and fall to pieces at the breath of mere men, however skilled in wordy warfare.

What arrant nonsense! Such observations are, of course, common enough; but they disclose an extraordinary confusion of thought. We can only reply that those who make them must be sadly ignorant of their innate imbecility and weakness. It is true that the danger to the reader is very great, but this danger arises not in the least degree from any inefficiency or defect in the foundations of the Faith; for the Church stands on an impregnable

rock and is absolutely invulnerable. We have the divine assurance that the gates of hell itself shall never prevail against it. No! The danger exists, but it is subjective, not objective. The danger lies wholly in the blindness and dulness of poor weak human nature, which is easily misled by specious words, and beguiled by fine-spun arguments, and which, having ventured into a contest with the agents of Satan, is as liable to be deceived and fall miserably as were Adam and Eve when they tried conclusions with the arch-fiend himself.

Such shallow excuses for flying into the very face of danger are, in sober truth, but sad indications of a subtle pride and vanity, and suggest a really culpable ignorance of man's spiritual misery and dependence. Nothing is easier than to raise difficulties; nothing is more common than to suggest doubts against the supernatural. So much almost any one can do without offering any claim to superior knowledge. Nor is it strange. Can not a child, with a match and a handful of straw, create a cloud which will, for the time being, hide even the very stars? It is a trite saying that "a fool can ask more questions than a wise

man can answer." And if this be true in the case of a fool, how far truer it must be when the questioner is not a fool at all, but a shrewd and clever reasoner, accustomed to dialectics, who has an object to accomplish, and who is wholly unscrupulous concerning the means he employs? How can we expect the average Catholic to read the effusions of rank infidels without receiving any harm? Has he the mental skill and training to parry every blow? Is he such a master of fence as never to be overcome by any adversary? The vast majority of Catholics are without profound knowledge either of history or theology or philosophy. They have never been trained for such encounters. They are little accustomed to the insidious ways, the counterfeit speech, the perverted sense, the false reasonings, the innuendoes, the tergiversations, the suppression of the true and the suggestion of the false, and the other shifts of a designing writer. They indulge their curiosity, yet suspect no evil. Silly flies suspect no danger in the spider's web, so deftly spread to catch their feet. In consequence, they perish by thousands. In like manner many a

silly human fly apprehends no danger in infidel books, and is allured to his doom, being entangled in the cunningly devised meshes of some sophistical argument.

To suppose that Catholics of ordinary ability, and without experience or preparation, should be able to see through and to detect all the wily sophistries proposed by some of the keenest and best practised intellects of the day, is sheer folly and madness. They seem to forget that amongst the immense number who write are to be found agnostics, materialists, positivists, and other infidels of unquestionable learning and ability. These are often men who have distinguished themselves at the universities; they are highly cultured; they possess an extraordinary command of language: they express themselves with elegance and ease, and sometimes with real eloquence; they set forth the most damnable doctrines and theories in well-balanced phrases and in carefully rounded periods, that captivate and charm the casual reader to his own destruction; reminding one, by reason of their methods, of those exquisitely tinted tropical berries which hide the deadliest poison under an

exterior of the most brilliantly beautiful forms and colors, and thus tempt the simple wayfarer to a deadly feast. Some, too, are masters of deception, and will present their views with an extraordinary show of plausibility. They will so dress up and deck out error that nine persons out of ten will take it for truth; and will surround vice itself with such a halo of virtue as almost to deceive even the elect.

The simple, self-confiding and inexperienced reader seems singularly unconscious of all this. He, accordingly, throws prudence to the winds; he refuses to curb his curiosity, and calmly persuades himself that he may safely read and study the worst publications of the day and run no risk; skate on the thinnest ice and not break through. Many a time have we seen beardless youths, and even young ladies fresh from the academies, thus courting disaster, and rushing in where angels themselves fear to tread. To this fact, indeed, must be in a large measure ascribed the deplorably lax views and unorthodox opinions held by not a few Catholics of the present time.

Pride, and pride alone, is at the bottom

of it. For what is it that such venturesome young persons practically say? Their conduct, translated into words, bears a very sinister aspect, and may be expressed as follows: 'I run no risk. I am more than a match for all these infidels. Clever men may disguise error, but not from me. They may represent evil as though it were good, and deceive others, but me they can never deceive. No: I am far too astute to be taken in. Let them weave their subtleties and their sophistries about me, and prepare their pitfalls and their snares. Such attempts may entrap the less wise, but they are wholly unavailing before my penetrating and all-seeing gaze. *I?* I can see through every difficulty. I can loosen every knot. I can unravel every tangle. I can make the rough ways smooth, and the crooked ways straight; detect falsehood under any guise it may assume; drag forth error triumphantly from its hiding-place into the light of day, and put my finger on every poisonous spot without fail.'

What presumption! Alas! their pride deceives them, and, unless corrected, will certainly bring upon them some terrible

calamity. "Pride goeth before destruction," says the Holy Spirit of God; "and the spirit is lifted up before a fall."* Such conceit soon receives its due punishment. They get entrapped in the toils of the snarer, become entangled and held fast in the twisted strands of error and infidelity, and suffer the just consequences of their rashness and disobedience. "Professing themselves to be wise, they become fools."†

We have no right whatever to expose ourselves to temptation against faith; we have received no promise of immunity if we do so. Quite the contrary. The Holy Spirit of God explicitly warns us that "he that toucheth pitch shall be defiled with it."‡ The plain truth is, we are not wise enough or prudent enough, or sufficiently courageous or enlightened, to sail our own fragile barque over the great sea of error and heresy which encompasses us upon every side. If we were, then Christ would never have commanded us to enter into the Barque of Peter, and to entrust ourselves and all our spiritual interests to him who alone has received the divine

* Prov., xvi, 18. † Rom., i, 22. ‡ Ecclus., xiii, 1.

assurance that *his* barque will ever ride in safety, even amid the fiercest and wildest storms; and, though tossed and buffeted, will never be wrecked on the shifting sands and shallows of infidelity.

Considering the lessons with which history abounds, and the many fresh examples with which experience is continually supplying us and placing as object lessons before our eyes, it is passing strange that honest and earnest Catholics should so little realize the power of evil, and their own inherent weakness to resist it. Yet so it is. The wisest and most learned of the saints would hardly venture to do what many of us, who possess not one hundredth part of their learning or one thousandth part of their sanctity, do without scruple or hesitation.

Take a single instance. Call to mind what we are told of St. Thomas of Aquin. He is considered the greatest and the profoundest of our theologians. His treatises are known and studied by every priest and ecclesiastical student throughout the world. There is scarcely a professor, teacher, or writer who does not refer to him or quote him when dealing with

Catholic theological questions. If there ever was a man who might feel secure when treading the slippery paths of heresy, and snap his fingers at any attempt to puzzle or delude him, it is the Angel of the Schools. Yet he was most circumspect, and by no means insensible to the peril arising from contact with error. In no jaunty spirit did he approach the study of heretical works, even with the purpose of confuting them, but with caution and circumspection, as one who is traversing an enemy's country. Though his marvellous insight into spiritual things and his exceptional penetration of mind won for him the title of the "Angelic Doctor," yet his diffidence and humility were such that he would never venture to enter into the infidels' camp, or expose himself to their batteries, until he had first armed himself by prayer and penance, and thus secured the divine assistance in order to discern truth from error, and to expose false doctrine.

It is recorded that sometimes, when engaged upon his great work, "Contra Gentiles," he would be troubled by this or that heretical objection, and unable at

once to find the solution. Then he would put aside his pen, and seek in humble prayer the light which was denied him in study. He would steal down to the church, and, throwing himself in great humility before the Tabernacle, or else at the foot of the crucifix, would earnestly implore help and understanding from Him who "enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world."* When, as sometimes happened, the answer did not at once come, he would add fasting to prayer, until at last God rewarded his faith and piety, and lovingly opened his eyes to the truth, enabling him to detect the fallacy and to deal with it in his own inimitable manner.

If such intellectual giants and such exalted saints and Doctors of the Church as St. Thomas of Aquin were so conscious of the contaminating influence of heresy and of the corrosive effects of false doctrine, how immeasurably more should we fear them, and stand on our guard against them! Great and constant should be our care to avoid all unnecessary contact with what is so contagious; for

* St. John, i, 9.

otherwise our faith will become gradually undermined and our intellects perverted. "Who thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall."

No observer, with any experience of life, can fail to note the terrible havoc that infidel and anti-religious books are causing even within the ranks of the children of the Church. The effect of these mischievous publications is often slow, and, as a rule, scarcely perceived at the time, but for that very reason only the more dangerous. "Drop by drop," it is said, "will wear away a stone." So in a similar manner the poison of infidelity and of doubt, instilled into the mind drop by drop through the medium of evil publications, will in the course of time wear away and destroy the strongest and the most irreproachable faith. The example of prudence and modesty and self-restraint set us by the saints should not be without its effect. We should distrust our weakness, deny ourselves all dangerous license, and ask God to guide and safeguard us from the snares and the fascinations of error. Then God will, in His great mercy, teach us prudence and rescue us from the effects of our own folly.

VI.

Danger Connected with Learning.

I.

It is pride that fills Modernists with such confidence in themselves, and leads them to hold themselves up as the rule for all; pride which puffs them up with vainglory, which allows them to regard themselves as the sole possessors of knowledge, and makes them say, inflated with presumption, "we are not as the rest of men." . . . There is no road which leads so directly and so quickly to modernism as pride.—*Pius X., Encyclical*, Sept. 8, 1907.

The labors of the Church have not had for their purpose to spread abroad knowledge or cultivate reason, but to avert sin and to save the souls of men, compared with which the value of the whole world is but dust and ashes. For it is not the things of time that she places first, but things of eternity; and literature, science, and art are things of time.

—*"The Key to the World's Progress," Devas, p.* 80.

THE gifts of God to man are both numerous and varied. Yet neither their number nor their variety strikes one so forcibly as their individual beauty and intrinsic worth. So soon as we look carefully into and examine their structure and finish, even the commonest amongst them fills us with admiration, and a thousand questions leap unbidden

to our lips,—questions, for the most part, that no man can answer. Who, for example, will explain the mysteries connected with the daily exercise of sight and of hearing? From earliest childhood we employ our eyes and ears and other organs of sense, with the utmost accuracy and ease. They are our first tutors and instructors, and convey to our minds more information concerning the great external world around us than any other teachers. Yet old age and decrepitude steal upon us before we can understand their operation, or unravel the processes by which they carry on their marvellous functions.

Each gift is precious, and contribute much to our comfort and well-being; but amongst the very greatest, in the natural order, must be reckoned reason or intelligence. In this, indeed, we contemplate the chief factor in man's earthly progress and perfection. Intelligence gives him an undisputed pre-eminence over all other visible beings. It more than compensates him for his physical weakness and insignificance. It is not only a far nobler but a far surer and better defence and protection, even against brute force, than would

have been, for instance, the horns and pachydermatous hide of the rhinoceros.

The light of reason shines only as a tiny spark in the undeveloped child; but it admits of wonderful increase, and may be continually improved and strengthened so long as life lasts. And, since every increase of knowledge adds to a man's present influence, and renders him better fitted to cope with the difficulties and to fulfil the functions of his social state, and to carry on the business of his trade or profession, it is greatly to his interest, and to the interest of the whole community, that he should cultivate and improve those talents which God has bestowed upon him, 'to trade with till He comes.'*

The Catholic Church has always acted upon this view, and helped to foster a love of knowledge. It was she who, in times past, established renowned universities, and caused every monastery to glow like a beacon, radiating light and learning. She it was who founded schools and colleges, and gathered the multitudes around her to receive instruction, not

* St. Luke, xix, 13.

only in religion, but in the arts and sciences,—in fact, in all branches of knowledge, whether sacred or profane. The Popes throughout the entire world, and the bishops in their respective dioceses, are acknowledged to have been among the most glorious promoters of learning, as well as its most enlightened and zealous patrons.

All honorable men, acquainted with the history of civilization, whether Catholics or not, admit the enormous debt that society owes to the Church, and readily confess that, were it not for the industry and labor of the monks* and friars of old, the most valuable writings

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* "In the old days," observes A. Jessopp, D. D., "the monks were *mutatis mutandis*, what in our time would be called cultured gentlemen—courteous, highly educated and refined, as compared with the great mass of their contemporaries; a privileged class, who were not abusing their privileges; a class from whence all the arts and letters and accomplishments of the time emanated, allied in blood as much with the low as with the high,—the aristocracy of intellect and the pioneers of scientific and material progress,"—"*Studies by a Recluse,*" pp. 30, 31.

and the priceless literary masterpieces of antiquity would have long since disappeared and been as utterly buried in oblivion as the literatures of Babylon and Phœnicia. Before printing had been invented, holy men, clothed in the black garb of St. Benedict or wearing the coarse brown habit of St. Francis, laboriously copied out, on vellum or parchment, not only the Sacred Scriptures and many learned commentaries upon it, and profound treatises on theology and history, but all else that was best worth preserving among the writings of Christians and pagans alike, both in Latin and Greek.

In short, the Church has proved herself a true lover of wisdom and a most earnest advocate of learning in every age. This is undoubtedly true, and it is necessary to insist upon it; for, in spite of this, she is often accused of being an obscurantist, and of desiring to keep her children in darkness and ignorance.* How are we to

* To bring contempt and odium on the mystic Spouse of Christ, who is the true Light, the children of darkness have been wont to cast in her face before the world a stupid calumny, and, perverting the meaning and force of things

account for so strange an anomaly? The answer is clear. It is simply because, however great her love of knowledge, there is something she loves better still, and that is virtue and moral goodness. Yes, it is because she prefers her children to be good rather than clever that she is represented as an enemy to intellectual progress.

It is a sad testimony to our present state of probation that even knowledge has its pitfalls and its dangers,* and it is with this aspect of the question that we are now chiefly concerned. The advantages of learning are obvious to all,—they lie on the surface; but the disadvantages

* In the first days of his pontificate, Pius X. was obliged to condemn five books of the Abbé Loisy, because they were "full of most grave errors concerning the primitive Revelation, the authenticity of the facts and teachings of the Gospels, the divinity and knowledge of Christ, the divine institution of the Church and the Sacraments," etc. The recent *Syllabus* condemns similar errors of students and learned men.

and words, to depict her as the friend of darkness and ignorance, and the enemy of light, science and progress.—*Pius IX.; quoted by Pius X.*

few seem even to suspect. Yet they undoubtedly exist, and should be clearly recognized by all who are anxious to guard themselves against disaster and spiritual ruin. In order that we may form a correct estimate of the dangers connected with learning, we shall do well to consider the teaching of the Church on the point, as well as the precise office that our intellect is intended to fulfil. We spoke of it as "one of our greatest gifts," and as "the chief factor in man's *earthly* progress and perfection." And no doubt intellect does contribute more than anything else to man's purely natural progress. But here, it must be understood, we are limiting our consideration, and taking man simply as a rational animal, living and moving among his fellows in this world; that is to say, we are contemplating man with the eyes, not of a Christian, but of an enlightened and respectable pagan, whose loftiest ideal scarcely rises beyond the *mens sana in corpore sano*.

But this purely physical and mental perfection, though very real and very excellent, so far as it goes, is, nevertheless, essentially earthly and of a low type.

There is another perfection of an immeasurably higher order, to which man may, through the merits of Christ, also aspire, and to which every other perfection is wholly subordinate. We refer to man's moral perfection—that to which we generally give the name of sanctity. It is of faith that sanctity constitutes man's supreme perfection. He can aim at nothing higher, nothing grander. It is the only kind of perfection to which God, in His infinite wisdom, attaches the smallest possible value.* On man's progress in sanctity depend his real worth in God's eyes, his future position in heaven, the nature and measure of the reward awaiting him, and all else best worth considering. These things depend not at all on man's mental or physical equipment, but solely on his personal holiness. Sanctity is so

* Thus, as Cardinal Newman so forcibly expresses it: "The Church holds that it were better for sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fail, and for all the many millions who are on it to die of starvation in extremest agony, as far as temporal affliction goes, than that one soul, I will not say should be lost, but should commit one single venial sin."—"*Anglican Difficulties*," *p.* 199.

essentially man's *one and only final end* that the value of all else is determined by its relation to that end. What promotes it is of value; what hinders it is valueless, or rather positively harmful.

With these principles to guide us, we may easily weigh, from a Catholic point of view, what degree of importance is to be attached to secular knowledge even the most exceptional, and to learning even the most extensive. What is the supernatural worth of the most intimate acquaintance with philosophy, history, and the sciences? How far, in respect of man's highest good, will the subtlest metaphysician obtain the advantage over the simple, unlettered lay-brother?

The answer may be gathered from the fact that man's whole moral worth and supernatural perfection is seated, not in the intellect, but in the will. Directly, the intellect has nothing to do with it. In itself, secular knowledge weighs no more in the balance than does physical strength or muscular development. To say that a philosopher of the highest rank, or the most renowned scientist the world has ever seen, is necessarily a more perfect

man, in the spiritual sense, simply because he is in possession of a larger number of facts than any other, and can handle them more dexterously, is obviously absurd. It would be as true to say that a man with a strong digestion must be holier than a dyspeptic. The first is more perfect physically, but such organic perfection is in no direct way connected with holiness. In fact, holiness generally lives in a very humble dwelling, and is more at home with a St. Benedict Labre in his rags and tatters than with a Solomon "in all his glory."

Learning is, of course, a great power, but the greatest power may be misapplied and abused. It may tend even to make the wicked worse. If a man be a thief, then learning will but serve to make him a more skilful and a more dangerous thief. If he be a tyrant and a despot, a rebel or a murderer, the only effect of learning will be to render him at once more formidable, more successful, and a greater scourge to society. Knowledge puts weapons into his hands to aid him in his nefarious designs. It multiplies his opportunities of doing evil, and decreases his chances of detection.

Pause for a moment and ask yourselves if it is not a fact that the blackest scoundrels the world has ever known, the greatest monsters in human form that have ever blotted the fair pages of history, the most notorious heresiarchs and cruelest persecutors of the Church of God, have come, almost without an exception, not from the ranks of the uneducated and the unlettered, but from the ranks of the educated and the worldly wise. Crime, under any circumstances, is odious enough, but there is no crime so detestable and so revolting as crime that is hatched in the council chambers of the learned, and devised by the prudence and cunning of the wise. Ignorance may sometimes excuse a fault or even a felony, whereas the measure of guilt keeps on steadily increasing with every increase of knowledge.

Perhaps the chief danger is that which is pointed out by the Spirit of God Himself, where He declares, by the lips of St. Paul, that "knowledge puffeth up."* In some respects, knowledge resembles riches. In fact, it is the riches of the

* Cor., viii, 1.

mind. And, just as a man who owns great possessions and much material wealth is apt to grow conceited, and to flatter himself that he is superior to, and of a nobler cast than, those who are poor and destitute of all worldly goods, so is it with him whose mind is well stocked with the riches of knowledge, and who has been endowed with exceptional mental gifts and powers. As the gift of reason places every man above the level of the beasts, so a highly cultivated and developed reason places its possessor above all those whose reason is of an inferior order, or less exercised and trained.

In fact, learning secures for its possessor a certain pre-eminence. It enthrones him on a sort of pedestal, from which he can always look down disdainfully upon the less gifted. He feels himself their superior. He can correct their misstatements, smile compassionately at their errors, comment upon their ignorance, and show a hundred times a day that he has the advantage over them. He may humble an opponent by a display of greater ability, and wither an objector by a word of irony or a biting sarcasm. Besides this, he finds himself

constantly referred to as an authority, and consulted almost as an oracle; while multitudes will love to listen to his speeches, to read his books, and to await his verdict upon almost any subject of public controversy.

A truly great man will not be much affected by such attentions, since he will realize his own shortcomings, and be the first to see that the sum total of his acquired knowledge is but an infinitesimal grain dug out of the vast universe of truth, that may be drawn upon forever without exhausting. But one without this broader view, who readily draws in the fumes of adulation that are so liberally offered to him, will gradually become intoxicated by the draught, and will, sooner or later, fall as proud men always fall. He will not merely take complacency in his strength, and look with pitying annoyance, perhaps with actual contempt, upon all who differ from him; but he may easily become so strongly wedded to his own opinions as to refuse to yield to any authority, however competent and legitimate. At this point his danger reaches an acute stage, and nothing but the ab-

sence of the occasion can avert disaster.*

There is no pride so imperious and so overbearing as intellectual pride; there is none so subtle or so difficult to conquer: there is none that so closely resembles the pride of Satan, none that works such havoc in the Church.† Further, it is, without exception, the very worst condition for the ready exercise of divine faith, which lies at the foundation of all religion, and 'without which it is impossible to please God.' This is a point worth developing, since it will account for certain defections that the Church has to deplore at the present day, besides serving as a valuable warning to ourselves.

No one can be received into or can remain in the one true Fold, of which our Blessed Lord is Shepherd, unless he submit his mind and his heart absolutely and unconditionally to the authority divinely constituted; and all submission means

* Thus, the decree of the Vatican Council, 1870, was the occasion of Dr. Döllinger's lamentable fall. He was excommunicated in 1871.

† The whole of Pius X.'s Encyclical Letter on "Modernism," September 8, 1907, serves to illustrate and to give weight to this statement.

humility. God exacts obedience to His law; and in obeying it we offer Him the service of our wills. That is to say, we do not what we wish, but what God wishes. But in addition to our free will we possess another stupendous gift from God—viz., our intellect. Is that to pay no fealty? Is that to acknowledge no master, to submit to no authority? Most assuredly. As our intellect comes from God as truly as our free will, it also must be made to recognize the same authority and to yield to the same guidance. How do we submit our intellect? By accepting, on the authority of God, whatsoever He proposes to our belief, and with equal readiness, whether the doctrine be expressed *directly* by His own divine lips, as the doctrine of the Holy Eucharist; or *indirectly*, by the mouth of His Church, as the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

Thus, humility is a condition of entry into the true Church. It is what St. Paul calls "the bringing into captivity every understanding to the obedience of Christ."* Our Lord's own words upon this point

* II. Cor., x, 5.

are yet more direct and emphatic. He tells us plainly that 'unless we be converted, and become as little children, we shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.'* That is to say, unless we have the meekness and the unquestioning trust in our Teacher that a child has in his, we can be no followers of Him. To do His *bidding* without murmur, is obedience,—i. e., the submission of the *will*. To accept His *teaching* without demur, is faith,—i. e., the submission of the *intellect*. Both are essential, for both will and intellect come from God. From this it follows that whatever interferes with humility and engenders pride, renders faith and obedience more difficult.

II.

Knowledge is in itself an admirable thing. It is power, influence, and prestige all at once. Yet it is a source of extreme danger unless accompanied by deep self-distrust. It is a gift, but not a gift that everyone knows how to profit by. It is a sword, but not a sword that everyone can

* St. Matt., xviii, 3.

wield. In fact, to change the metaphor, we may say that knowledge is related to a man very much as a sail is related to a boat. It is the secret of his usefulness, and he can make no steady advance without it. But it is a danger as well as a help. It is almost safer to have none than to have too much. As every sailor knows, a boat that is designed to carry a large quantity of sail must carry her keel deep down in the water, and must be heavily weighted with ballast. The heavier the ship, and the lower she lies below the watermark, the greater the amount of canvas she will bear. To hoist an enormous sail on a tiny boat is to doom it to certain destruction; for the slightest breath of wind will topple it over, and send it to the bottom.

In a somewhat similar manner, knowledge will be an undoubted help to one thoroughly grounded in humility. It will increase his opportunities of doing good; it will give him a deeper insight into divine things; it will render his meditations and his spiritual reading more profitable, and serve him as a devoted handmaid in a thousand important ways, because his

humility will safeguard him, and keep his soul, as the ballast keeps the ship. But if his knowledge puffs him up, and fills him with pride, conceit, and vainglory, then, bereft of the necessary ballast, he will soon suffer shipwreck and become a sport of the winds of temptation.

Of all the lessons taught us by history and experience, there is none sadder than that of the disintegrating power of intellectual pride. All through the centuries, from the earliest dawn of Christianity to the present day, are found instances of gifted and learned men who have suffered shipwreck of the faith through their unwillingness to bend their proud intellects to the decisions of authority. They clung obstinately to their own personal views, and refused to conform to the ruling of the ecclesiastical courts. They had more confidence in the dictates of their own fallible reason than in the judgment of the infallible Church; and when once they had committed themselves to any particular view, they grew so self-opinionated and so wedded to it, that they determined to uphold it and maintain it against the Pope and the whole council of bishops and

cardinals. The fact is, self looms so large before the mind of a proud man that it seems to hide all else, and to prevent his recognizing the true proportion of things.

The fallacy that deludes some otherwise sane persons is that when they differ from the Church they do but differ from certain ecclesiastics who, however exalted and eminent, are, after all, but men as they are. They permit themselves to think and talk and argue just as though it were a question of purely human dialectics, in which mind is pitted against mind, and man against man. Though this indicates a singular ignorance of the very constitution of the Church, which is the infallible mouthpiece of God, it is an ignorance which often darkens counsel, and blinds the eyes of those who see clearly enough in purely worldly matters.

It is not so many years ago that a distinguished scientist displayed such ignorance in a letter addressed to the London press. He had denied some tenet of Catholic doctrine; he had published articles in defence of his heretical opinion; he had in consequence incurred the censures of

the Church. What was the result? He began to question, not only the right of the Church to interfere in such matters, but her very ability and capacity to determine the point at issue. When face to face with the condemnation, he became indignant. The Church? he cried. What is the Church? Well, when we put on one side the glamour and prestige and bewitchery that have come to surround the word, and calmly analyze it, we find that the Teaching Church is nothing more than a body of ecclesiastics, possessing no more enlightenment or education or intellectual ability than is possessed by us laymen, who differ from them. Why should we, then, renounce our liberty, or deem it necessary to accept their solution of a difficulty or their explanation of a text, when it fails to satisfy us? We have the same means of judging as they, and access to the same documents. Our intellectual gifts are as reliable, our reason as keen, our memory as retentive, and so forth.

Such men ignore the essential character of the Church. They treat it as they would treat any other learned body, whereas it is radically different from all

other bodies. They confound the issues and miss the whole point. They knock very long and very loudly, and arouse the whole neighborhood; but their knocking is at the wrong door. An appeal to one's own individual judgment in opposition to the judgment of the entire Church would be absurd enough, even on the supposition that the Church were but a human society, endowed with mere human intelligence. A man must needs possess a fine assurance who will claim to surpass all his teachers, including the subtlest and the saintliest. But even this is not the point here. In the case before us we are not contemplating a little child pretending to teach its hoary-headed professor; nor are we considering a discussion between one created mind, however feeble, with another, however strong; for in all such cases the difference is only one of degree. No: we are contemplating a conflict where the difference is radical and measureless. We are contemplating feeble man resisting and contradicting the very Oracle of God,—the puny creature in revolt against his Creator.

The Church established by God has a

divine as well as a human side.* It is, of course, composed of various members, just as a human body is composed of various members. But as in the human body there is an invisible spirit that acts on and through the members, and animates and pervades them, and is yet distinct from them, so there is likewise in the Church an invisible Spirit that acts on and through her members, and is yet distinct from them and above them. And that Spirit is no other than the Spirit of God, the Third Person of the Adorable Trinity; so that he who fights against the Church, fights against God. Christ promised that the Holy Ghost should abide with His Church forever, to teach her all truths, and to protect her from all errors. He declared her to be indefectible. He guaranteed, on the authority of His own word, that the gates of hell (i. e., the powers of darkness) should never prevail against her. He even commanded us to listen to her voice as to His own, and would allow

* It is, to use Newman's words, "informed and quickened by what is more than intellect—viz., by a Divine Spirit."

no distinction to be drawn, in this respect, between her and Himself. "He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me."* Nay, more: He threatened with eternal damnation any and every one who should wilfully refuse to hear and obey her infallible voice. "If he will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican."†

Though truth be enunciated in human language, it is none the less truth; though it reaches us through material channels, it is none the less divine; though God addresses us by means of His Vicar, the Pope, it is still the voice of God rather than the voice of man, and the doctrine proposed to our belief is infallibly true. Not only is this fact set forth with the utmost precision in the inspired pages of Holy Writ,‡ but it forces itself upon our acceptance, as a dire necessity, just as soon as we pause to consider the object and purpose for which the Church has been

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* St. Luke, x, 16. † St. Matt., xviii, 17.

‡ St. Paul gives thanks to God because the Thessalonians received his words "not as the word of men, but (as it truly is) the word of God." (I. Thess., ii, 13.)

called into being. It was established for the express purpose of teaching. Its very object is to bear witness. It exists to point the way, to guide the faltering steps of the benighted pilgrim, to lead the wanderer safely home. It endures century after century, that it may enable the humble Christian to thread his way in safety amid the entanglements of error; that it may safeguard him from the cunning and deceits of insidious foes; that it may supply him with a steady beacon amid the gathering gloom of an infidel world, and be, in one word, a light to his feet and a guide to his steps.

If its guidance be unreliable, if it be anything less than absolutely infallible, it can serve no such purpose, and Infinite Wisdom must be at fault. For of what possible use is a leader that can not lead, a teacher that can not teach, a light that does not enlighten, a compass that does not point, or a messenger that knows not how to deliver his message? If the Church of God is not able to teach revealed truth to the scientist and to the philosopher and to the historian, as well as to others; if, on the contrary, it be, as some seem to

imagine, a leaking vessel that can not hold the precious liquor of divine truth until it has been tinkered and soldered and put to rights by them; if, in short, it is incompetent to carry out the special task entrusted to it by the almighty and infinite God, then surely it is no church of His. Better far set up a man of straw and let that be our guide; that, at least, will not lead us astray.*

We can understand such depreciation of the Church by men who see nothing in it but a mere human institution. But to such we make no appeal. We address ourselves to Catholics: to those whose very

* Writing, even before his reception into the Church, Cardinal Newman delivers himself as follows: "If the very claim to infallible arbitration in religious disputes is of so weighty importance and interest in all ages of the world, much more is it welcome at a time like the present, when the human intellect is so busy, and thought so fertile, and opinion so manifold, The *absolute need* of a spiritual supremacy is at present the strongest of arguments in favor of the fact of its supply. Surely, either an objective revelation has not been given, or it has been provided with means for impressing its objectiveness on the world."—"*Development of Christian Doctrine,*" *ch. ii, sec. ii,* §13.

principles oblige them to acknowledge that Christ, the Son of God, founded the Church for the special purpose of handing down, undefiled by error and untouched by heresy, the sacred deposit of Faith. These are in no position to doubt her prerogative. What conception of the power and veracity of God, we wonder, can they have who imagine that He has ever failed or ever can fail in the execution of His promise; who fancy that they may correct the supposed errors of that Church with which He abides forever, and who are so ready to enlighten and direct it with their superior wisdom? When the Ark of God seemed to lean to one side, we are told that Oza, fancying that it was about to fall, dared to stretch forth his hand as though to save it,* and he was at once struck dead in punishment of his rashness. Yet the worldly-wise are constantly imagining the Catholic Church is about to fall, and stretch forth their hands to hold it up, all unconscious of any rashness or presumption. Scarcely a century passes but some impatient

* II. Kings, vi 6.

individuals may be found applying themselves to this singularly thankless task. Such persons are not to be reasoned with. They are Catholics in name only; for by their very action they clearly deny either God's most explicit promises, or else His ability to keep them. They exceed their powers. Such men as these would fain teach the swallows how to fly, and the sun itself how to shine.

It is the Catholic Church alone that puts our intellectual submission really to the test, and, by demanding assent to her wondrous dogmas, secures the absolute sacrifice of private judgment. First, she bids us offer as a holocaust to God the gift we most prize—namely, our own personal opinion; and then she rewards us by disclosing to us the most admirable and the most consoling doctrines. He who will not believe in the Real Presence can never know the comfort and the joys that the Blessed Sacrament enshrines; and he who admits not the position assigned to Mary by the Catholic Church in the economy of divine grace, can never experience what it is to possess so powerful an advocate and so loving and devoted

a Mother. These and hundreds of other inestimable advantages are purchased by the exercise of faith. They are rewards bestowed on those whose trust in God, through good report and through evil report, never fails, and whose confidence never wavers.

It is well for us, who enjoy the great gift, to reflect on our privileges, and to remember that we honor God by subjecting our reason to the teaching of His Church. To trust God only so far as we can understand, is not to trust at all. When we constitute our reason the supreme judge, it is our reason, and our reason alone, that we honor and enthrone. So far from accepting the decree or the definition on the solemn assurance of the Church, we proceed to summon it before the tribunal of our own mind. We submit it to a critical cross-examination; we sit in judgment upon it. We sift and weigh the arguments so far as our poor little intellect is capable, and then we decide to accept or reject it. But, whether accepted or rejected, it is ourselves and not the Church whom we obey. It is we who actually pass the sentence. There is here no real obedience to a divinely

constituted authority. There is no submission of the intellect; no "bringing into captivity every understanding";* no humble renunciation of our private judgment; no yielding without seeing to another; no prostration of our whole being before the dread sovereignty of God; in a word, no true exercise of divine faith.

From this it is clearly seen that high intellectual gifts are not without danger to poor fallen man, and that none can be prudently entrusted with them but such as are fully sensible of their own inherent weakness and blindness in spiritual things. Even the most devout will scarcely keep his footing on the dizzy heights of doctrinal decisions, until he comes to realize that religious truth rests upon higher grounds than any the world has to offer; and that the mysteries of God and the facts of revelation are not arrived at by mere human argument, but by the guidance of the indwelling Spirit of God, who is so infinitely lifted above the world that not merely its foolishness, but even its very wisdom also, is but folly in His sight. "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."†

* II. Cor., x, 5. † I. Cor., iii, 19.

VII.

Intemperance.

I.

Porque como el vino es tan caliente, inflama todos los humores y miembros del cuerpo, y asi á todas ellas inflama y fortifica: de manera, que en este tiempo el alegria es mayor, y la ira y el furor, y el amor, y la osadia y el deleyte: y asi en las otras pasiones. Por do parece que siendo uno de los principales oficios de las virtudes morales domar y mitigar estas pasiones: el vino es de tal qualidad, que hace el oficio contrario: pues con la vehemencia de su calor enciende lo que estas virtudes apagan: para que por aqui vea el hombre quanto se debe guardar de él.*

UPON every side we are surrounded by the countless gifts of an all-wise and an all-loving Father. "His gifts are strewn upon our way like sands upon the great seashore," as Father Faber so truly observes. And if God has embellished our earthly and temporary home with so endless a variety of objects, it is not merely that they may administer to our present needs and secure for us much comfort and happiness, but far more that they should help us—some in one way and some in another—to attain

* "Guia de Pecadores," por L. de Granada. p. 359

the sublime and supernatural end for which He, in His infinite mercy, has destined us.

So admirably, indeed, has His design been realized that we may affirm without hesitation that there is in the whole of this wide world no single object which may not be of assistance to us in the acquirement of virtue, provided only that we use it in the manner intended by the Giver. "We know," exclaims St. Paul, "that to them that love God *all* things work together unto good, to such as, according to His purpose, are called to be saints."* Yes, all things without exception, if properly handled, may be pressed into the service of God, and forced to help us upward and onward toward the goal.

But this life is a period of trial. It is essential that our virtue should be exercised. If, therefore, on the one hand, it be true that there is no object in this world which may not assist us, it is equally true, on the other, that there is no object in the world that may not hinder us. Whether any given object actually hinders or helps, depends upon

* Rom., viii, 28.

our attitude toward it. There is nothing, however holy and however admirable, so formed and endowed that it must necessarily, and in spite of ourselves, lift us up and draw us to sanctity. Even the best things may have a diametrically opposite effect; the effect, whether good or bad, being dependent upon the way in which the thing is made use of.

Are not the sublimest gifts open to abuse? Have not heretics abused the Scriptures—i. e., God's own word? Do not they who receive unworthily the Blessed Sacrament—i. e., Christ's own sacred Body—abuse this divine gift and receive it to their own damnation? Is there anything anywhere that malice may not abuse and pollute and prostitute to ignoble ends? No, nothing! Hence man's sanctity must ever be largely determined by his making a good rather than a bad use of God's creatures. If he allows them to serve the purpose God intends, all will be well. If not, then man becomes the author of his own misfortunes. He digs a pit and will fall into it. As a practical and pertinent illustration of the truth of this statement,

consider man's attitude toward strong drink and spiritous liquors.

Wine must be allowed, most undoubtedly, to rank among the gifts of God to man. The Holy Scripture itself bears willing testimony to its exhilarating effects, and declares that it is bestowed to "cheer the heart of man,"* and that from the beginning it was created "to make man joyful."† Hence it occasions no surprise when we find St. Paul earnestly recommending its use to Timothy, the Bishop of Ephesus, whom he had himself consecrated. "Do not still drink water," urges the Apostle; "but *use a little wine* for thy stomach's sake, and thy frequent infirmities."‡ Nay, more: we have it recorded for our instruction in the inspired page that Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, not only sanctioned its use but went so far as to exercise His divine omnipotence and to perform a stupendous miracle for the express purpose of providing wine for the guests of the wedding feast of Cana. The merry party had already

* Ps., ciii, 15. † Ecclus., xxxi, 35.

‡ I. Tim., v, 23.

drunk generously,* but the amount provided proved insufficient; so at last, "when the wine failed, the Mother of Jesus said to Him: They have no wine."† And Jesus, ever ready to accede to any request coming from His Blessed Mother, at once changed the water, stored up in six great waterpots of stone, into most delicious wine; so that the chief steward, in blank astonishment, exclaimed: "Every man *at first* setteth forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, *then* that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine *until now.*"

From this it is abundantly evident that wine is a genuine gift from God, and something unquestionably good and innocent in itself. So much must be granted; yet, in spite of this fact, we are bound to confess that it would be extremely difficult to point to any gift that men have so grossly and so continuously abused. They have diverted it from its legitimate purpose and true end; they have made it

* It seems, from the steward's remark, that they had already "*well drunk.*" See his words quoted lower down.

† St. John, ii, 3.

the occasion of endless crimes and sins, and have thus converted, what was intended as a blessing, into a curse and a snare. They have forgotten the object for which it was bestowed, and, by their shameful excesses, have rendered it a fruitful source of drunkenness and debauchery. Who will reckon up the millions upon millions of degraded men and women who have lost their souls eternally through an improper use of this one creature of God, which is in itself absolutely blameless and without guile! In the present age especially, its evil effects are almost everywhere conspicuous, and should be brought frequently before the attention of the public, so that those who have not yet been contaminated may be duly warned and put more upon their guard. "The Drink Question," says Charles Gide, "is one of the questions of the day."*

Wine and spirits and other strong potions are, in themselves, so simple and

* "Political Economy," p. 368. Speaking as a political economist, he says that drink leads to "incapacity for work, disease, madness, crime, and suicide."

innocent that it is exceedingly difficult to realize how appalling and how far-reaching are the consequences of their abuse. Actual experience, and the undeniable testimony afforded by contemporary history, are essential to enable one to measure with any degree of accuracy the extent of the havoc they have produced, and are still producing, all over the civilized world. For, certainly, without actual experience and personal observation no one would have imagined that drink, as an engine of death and destruction, could ever have competed successfully with such scourges as war, famine, and pestilence, much less that it should far surpass them all; yet this is the undoubted verdict of history, supported by statistics and by many most trustworthy authorities.

Judges upon the bench have often expressed the opinion that 99 per cent of the crimes brought before them are traceable, directly or indirectly, to excessive drinking. Similar statements have been made by the governors of his Majesty's jails; while medical men admit that it has done more than anything else to fill our lunatic asylums and houses for

the insane. Many physicians have borne witness against this terrible curse. They tell us not merely that over-indulgence in alcohol actually produces many diseases, but that such indulgence places the patient at an extreme disadvantage, even in cases in which the malady itself arises from quite other causes. No matter what the disease may be, a sober and temperate person will run a far better chance of recovery than one whose blood has been poisoned and whose whole constitution has been undermined by excess.

It is, alas! only too true that men who have contracted a habit of drinking soon become slaves to it, and that they will seek to justify their conduct by a hundred plausible pretexts. They will wax eloquent on the advantages to be derived from recourse to their favorite beverages, and will fill their glass on the slightest provocation. Any occasion suffices, such as:

A friend, good wine;
Or because they are dry;
Or lest they should be by and by;
Or any other reason why.

Yet, as a matter of fact, there is very little to be said in favor of alcohol as an article

of food. "It is," Dr. B. W. Richardson* explains, "a product of the laboratory, belonging thereto, and is out of place when it is used for any other than a purely medical, chemical, or artistic purpose. It is no food; it is the most certain and insidious destroyer of health, happiness, and life."

The most stalwart peoples, in the zenith of their power, seldom touched these blood-stirring concoctions. The warlike Spartans, for instance, refrained from strong drink, and loathed nothing so much as the sight of a drunken man. If one were discovered among their slaves, they would point him out disdainfully as a warning to their sons. The ancient Britons, too, so noted for their fine athletic forms, their swiftness of foot, their great proficiency in wrestling, swimming, and other physical exercises, such as wielding the broad sword and drawing the long bow, never touched strong liquor of any kind. So, again, the classical author Cæsar writes that the Suevi were by far the most renowned warriors and the best fighting men in Germany, yet they never

* "A Ministry of Health," p. 92.

partook of anything stronger than milk. If, further, we consult the sacred books of the Indians, we shall find that the use of intoxicating drinks is forbidden; yet, notwithstanding this, the most observant among the Hindoos are far more vigorous than our own beer-drinking, gin-gulping laborers. The Sepoys for instance, will march from twenty to thirty miles a day, heavily burdened, and under a scorching sun, yet will not turn a hair or manifest any signs of fatigue.

In a word, it is quite evident that men may succeed in every walk of life, and endure considerable fatigue and undergo prolonged exertion, without seeking aid from either wine or spirits. Where this need is felt it is a fictitious one, and born of an evil habit, which should never have been contracted. Indeed, "physicians, who have investigated the effect of alcohol on the system, have come to the conclusion that it is not a food, and does not in any way make flesh or tissue."*

The only correct inference to be drawn from this is that the more temperate we are in the use of fermented drinks the

* Dr. York Davies, "Foods for the Fat," p. 66.

better it will be for for us, both in soul and body. "If," writes Dr. B. W. Richardson,* "such a miracle could be performed in England as a general conversion to temperance, the vitality of the nation would rise one-third in its value, and this without reference to the indirect advantages that would of necessity follow."

Designing men are well aware of the deleterious effects of strong drinks, and their general demoralizing influence. When they seek to persuade their dupes to pass the bounds of moderation, we may well grow suspicious; for it is generally for some sinister motive, such as to inspire them with a false courage or to silence the qualms of conscience, and in order that they may consent to evil rather than to good. In the following words of Count Tolstoi we shall recognize a sad and humiliating truth: "If a person wishes to make others do wrong, he alcoholizes them. They make soldiers drunk before sending them into battle. At the time of the assault of Sebastopol, all the French soldiers were drunk. It is well known that robbers, brigands, and prostitutes can

* "A Ministry of Health," p. 178.

not dispense with alcohol. All the world agrees that the consumption of these narcotics has for its object the stifling of the remorse of conscience; and yet—unless the use of these exhilarants result in actual assassination, theft and violence—they are not condemned."*

That we may be strengthened to fight the battle against intemperance more valiantly, it is very necessary that we should understand as clearly as possible not only the evils that it causes, but also how these evils come to be associated with drink. For this purpose, we must begin by considering the special circumstances of our present life. Since man was first introduced into this world, he has undergone a radical change. He is not now in his normal state. The exquisite harmony that the Creator established between the various elements of his complicated nature when he first issued forth, perfect and innocent, from the divine hands, has been rudely disturbed. The poison of original sin, entering into his system, bred disorder and dire confusion.

* Quoted by J. Bigelow in "Mystery of Sleep," 2d edit., p. 187.

Man is no longer a well-balanced being, in whom intellect and conscience rule, and the lower appetites and impulses readily obey: he is a strange amalgam of conflicting inclinations and turbid passions, carrying on an internecine war within his very soul.

In every member of the human race, as now constituted, there are two very different parts to be considered. There is, in the first place, the reasoning principle within us; and, in the second place, there is the untamed and unreasoning principle,—i. e., our higher self and our lower self; or what the Apostle refers to respectively as the "spirit" and the "flesh." Listen to his inspired words: "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary one to another."* Or, again, weigh well the following passage, where he expresses the same truth in yet more personal and forcible language: "I am delighted with the law of God according to the inward man; but I see *another law* in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin that is in my members."†

* Gala., v, 17. † Rom., vii, 22, 23.

The good and evil tendencies within us, or what St. Paul calls the spirit and the flesh, are ever striving for the mastery; and if we are to obtain the eternal fruits of victory, it can be only by weakening the one and strengthening the other. Hence it is to our interest, and indeed a positive duty, to put forth all our energy to repress the evil principle and to promote the good. But is that the conduct of the intemperate? Emphatically, no! The man who yields himself up to the attractions of drink follows *precisely the opposite course*. He greatly fosters and encourages the flesh, feeds fat his rebellious appetites, and raises up innumerable fresh obstacles in the path of virtue.

For strong drink enkindles evil desires, and arouses the wild beast that lies dormant in every child of Adam. It quickens the blood, and causes it to course through the veins like liquid fire; so that, under its influence, man no longer retains the mastery over himself, and is not in a condition to act, or even to think, calmly and reasonably. The noblest gift that he has received from God, in the natural order, is reason. Deprived

of that, man is inferior to the beasts. He lacks their strength, their power of endurance, their keenness of vision, fleetness of foot, and much else. But man has what the beast has not: he possesses reason; and that one gift crowns him with a God-given authority, and enables him to "subdue the earth, and to rule over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and all living creatures" (Gen., i, 28), as God in the very beginning promised him that he should.

Further, it is in virtue of his possessing memory, will, and understanding, the three great powers of his one indivisible soul, that we recognize in him the image and likeness of the ever-blessed Trinity, the three Persons in the one indivisible Unity of God. Now, the drunkard effaces this divine resemblance, since he throws his intellect off its balance, and loses all control over his memory and will, and renders himself wholly incapable of following the dictates of reason. He disgraces his manhood and removes every trace of his noble origin. He can not think clearly, he can not speak articulately, nor can he so much as regulate the motions of his

feet. He can not walk, but staggers along, swaying now to one side, now to another, threatening each moment to measure his length along the ground; a picture of impotence and imbecility,—a sorry figure for scorn and derision to point their withering fingers at.

But the drunkard is not satisfied to extinguish all his highest and best gifts: he at the same time unchains the thousand hell-hounds pent up within him, that await but the occasion to run riot and to lay waste.

II.

It is a most extraordinary and melancholy fact, but nevertheless a most certain one, that under the influence of liquor man becomes an utterly changed being. It is just as though his own soul had temporarily deserted him, and that some foul, passionate, and reckless fiend had entered into his body and usurped its place, and were ruling and directing all his thoughts, words, and actions. No one can fail to note the contrast between the two states. Every good quality, every admirable characteristic, every virtuous

impulse seems to have suddenly abandoned him; while the most unnatural and the most unwonted vices and passions seem to have all at once taken their place.

Again and again have we observed this lamentable transformation of the man into the beast, and the sight has filled us with almost as much amazement as distress. We felt as though we were contemplating the irresponsible vagaries of a maniac, not the actions of a reasonable being; the senseless extravagances of a demon, not the doings of a child of the Church. The whole character appeared turned inside out. Every engine of the soul seemed reversed, and every power misdirected. "*Nil fuit unquam sic impar sibi,*" as Horace would say. The loving husband and gentle, doting father is converted into a brute and a monster. His very love is, for the time being, turned to hate. He violently attacks her whom he has sworn before God's altar to cherish and protect. He insults her with foul language, and wounds her with cruel and injurious words. Perhaps he raises his hand and, with a muttered curse, fells her to the ground. His little children, who cluster

around him and clamber over his knees when he is sober, are now scared, and, fearing to approach him, fly away to escape ill treatment and blows. He upsets the whole house, flings the furniture about, breaks all that he can lay his hands upon; and wherever he goes creates dread, sorrow, and confusion.

When the effect of the alcohol is spent, he begins to realize the evil he has done. His heart breaks to see the marks of his closed fist upon the face of the wife he loves so well and to witness the horror and consternation depicted on the puzzled countenances of his trembling little ones. He feels sick at heart; he resolves never so far to forget himself again; he vows never more to break and destroy and lay waste. His vows to Heaven are perhaps quite sincere; he really means what he says,—at least *while he says it*. But, alas! habit has weakened him. When the occasion again arises, and the means of gratifying his unnatural thirst are at hand, the chances are that his good resolutions are forgotten, and he falls again an easy prey to the cravings of his evil passion, which, growing stronger

and more unruly with every indulgence, at length drags him down to a lower and lower level, reducing him finally to a permanent state of irreclaimable shame and degradation.

Habit is a tremendous force, whether for good or for evil. It has rightly been called "a second nature," easily formed, and with difficulty overcome. One who knowingly contracts an evil habit, deliberately yields himself up into the arms of a giant, and can scarcely free himself from his grasp. He becomes the slave and bondsman of passion, and forges for himself iron chains that (except by a miracle of grace) will never break asunder, but will hold him fast in the fires of hell forever. "A brain trained to respond to the calls of duty soon does so with ease and elasticity, just as the muscles of the blacksmith's arm or the ballet dancer's leg acquire strength and vigor by exercise; while, on the other hand, self-control is an effort to the soft and flabby brain which has been weakened by self-indulgence."* Surely these last words apply to the victim of drink more than to any other.

* "Modern Science," by S. Laing. p. 316.

It is hard enough, even under the most favorable circumstances, to walk along the narrow way of God's commandments, and to contend successfully with the many enemies who are ever plotting our downfall; but we render it immeasurably more difficult when we go out of our way to raise up other adversaries of quite exceptional vehemence and ferocity. Even the most temperate of men will have his battles to fight and his spurs to win; but his task is light compared to that of the intemperate man, whose reprehensible conduct has been, on the one hand, strengthening the power and increasing the number of his enemies, and, on the other hand, rendering himself less and less capable of offering them any effective resistance.

It must be borne in mind that drink develops and brings out into greater prominence the lowest and purely animal instincts. It excites lustful desires; it stirs up the fires of concupiscence; it fills us with a hundred evil inclinations; it renders us testy and litigious, quick to pick a quarrel, and ready on the slenderest pretext, or upon no pretext whatever, to fight and contend and

wrangle. How large a proportion of murders are committed through drink!

Even the best of men, under the influence of liquor, fling prudence to the winds, sacrifice what is dearest and best to indulge the whim of a moment; and are as utterly devoid of even the first elements of modesty and shame as the untamed beast of the primeval forest. In many respects, they sink not only to the level of the irrational animals, but far below them; since drink often incites a man to cruelty toward his own species, and murder and incest, and other crimes and abominations, of which the wildest denizens of the forest are wholly incapable. Drink does yet more: it saps his moral strength, and so enfeebles his will that he falls an easy prey to every gust of temptation. If long continued, it not unfrequently brings about such perturbation of mind and such a dulling of the faculties that he scarcely realizes his state, or notices the imminent risk he is running of losing his soul.

At last the drunkard comes to fear neither God nor devil, defies hell and all its horrors, and, without any real

consciousness of his impending fate, will stand with one foot over the dreadful abyss, ready at any moment to topple over should any accident sever the brittle cord of life. In other words, hardness of heart and spiritual blindness often take possession of the sinner who has so frequently and so deliberately closed his ears to repeated warnings, and who has so persistently shut his eyes to the light, until finally, to use the expression of Holy Writ, "God delivers him up to a reprobate sense." Such as these, more than others, seem to illustrate one of the most awful texts of the Gospel,—namely, "He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes nor understand with their hearts, and be converted."*

And now I wish to point out one altogether special consequence which often overtakes the habitual drunkard, and which is eminently deserving of our most serious consideration; for, whilst it is most appalling in itself, it seems to be quite peculiar to this special form of vice. It is that the drunkard not only

* St. John, xii, 40.

sins, but by his sin often renders it impossible that he should obtain forgiveness; that is to say, he frequently places himself in a position in which neither priest nor absolution nor sacraments can render him the slightest service. He may truly be said, on these occasions, to render salvation itself a practical impossibility.

To realize the gravity as well as the reality of this danger, we must begin by calling to mind the infinite mercy and boundless compassion of God, and His eager desire that all should be saved. This desire is so strong and so sincere that He declares Himself ready to pardon even the deadliest offence and the blackest crime, provided only that we turn to Him, even though it be at the very last moment, and elicit an act of true contrition. Thus, a highway robber may be struck down at the very moment of thieving. His intended victim, in self-defence, may send a bullet through his heart. Yet if the robber find time enough, before expiring, to call upon God for mercy and to make an act of perfect contrition, that act will save him, and his prayer will not be refused. Yea, even

though he be guilty not only of robbery but also of the foulest murder, and though his hands be still red with the blood of his victim, he may, even then, hope for forgiveness. For if only he repent of his crime, and be heartily and sincerely sorry, God will not close the door of His mercy upon him, but will wash away the foulest stain from his soul. "If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow; and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool."* For Christ "came not to call the just but sinners to penance."†

But—and this is the all-important point—before such mercy can be exercised, certain conditions are absolutely essential. All forgiveness is made dependent upon repentance. Therefore, it is imperative that the sinner should be capable of eliciting, *and should actually elicit*, an act of genuine and conscious sorrow.

Now comes the question: Is it possible for any man to fulfil such a condition while laboring under the influence of drink? How can one whose brain is muddled, and whose reason is clouded, and whose

* Isa., i, 18. † St. Luke, v, 32.

faculties refuse to serve him, so collect himself and so view the whole situation at that supreme moment as to be able to weigh the gravity of his offence and the peril that is menacing him, and the goodness and mercy of the God he has outraged? How can he realize his predicament sufficiently to enable him to break forth in humble prayer, and to utter conscious words of profound and heart-broken contrition? It is a physical impossibility. He can no more do this than a madman can work out a mathematical problem or decide an intricate point of law. His mind is in confusion; he is not in a condition to exercise any of its powers; he is, for the time being, as one bereft of reason, as one already dead.

No! Should death overtake him in this plight, his state is a desperate, a hopeless one, and nothing can rescue him from the bottomless pit. Should he fall in a drunken brawl, or be run over in the street, or be smashed up in a railway accident, or perish in any one of the countless other ways in which such men are wont to be hurried out of life, he can not save himself from hell by an act of

contrition, for the obvious reason that he is hopelessly incapable of making one. In such cases—and they are exceedingly common—he must inevitably wake up from his drunken orgies amid the quenchless flames and Stygian darkness and the eternal desolation and agony prepared for the devil and his angels. O terror beyond all terrors! O horror surpassing all horrors! Yet this is the end to which drink naturally tends.

And who is to blame for such a consummation? Who alone is responsible? It is no other than the sinner himself. For, dispute it as we may, it is he who has bound fast the patient hands of God's infinite mercy so that He is unable to help; it is he who has wantonly placed himself beyond the reach of God's healing grace; it is he who has deliberately deprived himself of the power of uttering a cry for mercy in his extreme need; and without at least one strong, piercing cry for pity and forgiveness, he can obtain no redress, but must resign himself to his fate,—a fate too horrible to describe, too appalling even to imagine or conceive. For "which of you can dwell with devour-

ing fire? Which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"*

This is no imaginary case, nor is it possible to regard it even as a rare and unusual occurrence. Indeed, it is a notorious fact that the drunkard exposes himself, *as no other*, to every kind of fatal accident and to every form of violent death. Innumerable are the instances in which the unfortunate victims of intemperance are hurried into eternity. Who, then, in his senses, will give himself up to a vice fraught with such exceptionally awful consequences? Who will expose himself to so terrible and ghastly a fate?

Yet even when death comes without violence, and when there is time to call in a priest, how often it happens that the wretched man is unable to avail himself of his administrations! Where a man is suffering from delirium tremens, and lies at the point of death, while still under the effects of alcoholic poisoning, the minister of God may indeed stand by his side, but he can do nothing. He may whisper into the ears of the dying; he

* Isa., xxxiii, 14.

may exhort him to make his peace with God; but it is like addressing words of exhortation and consolation to a corpse. He may pronounce the sacred formula of absolution over the prostrate form; he may anoint his trembling limbs with the holy oil; but all to no purpose. Unless the sinner can rouse himself from his stupor and put himself in the proper dispositions to receive the benefit of the sacraments, they will be administered to him in vain. And he, who would not obey the voice of God calling him to a life of sobriety in this world, will have to obey the summons to judgment, unreconciled and unhealed, and to listen to the "Depart from Me, ye cursed!" issuing from the lips of the Sovereign Judge.

What man living, and realizing all this, can rest unmoved at the thought of the fearful prevalence of intemperance! Who is there that will allow this habit to deepen and strengthen unchecked! A taste for strong drinks and ardent spirits is not a natural taste but an acquired one. The craving is weak at first; it increases by slow degrees; and, if taken in time, may easily be mastered, with a little resolution.

Nemo repente fuit turpissimus. If the incipient drunkard would but look ahead, and reflect on the consequences of the habit, before it becomes inveterate, he might easily check its progress or arrest it altogether. Indeed, it is far more from inadvertence and want of consideration than from any uncontrollable attraction that so many thousands of men and women enter so lightly upon this road to eternal ruin.

This undoubtedly constitutes one of the great dangers of the day; and a danger it remains, in spite of the many excellent attempts to combat it. Would that it were within our power to sound a trumpet blast of warning that should resound throughout the world, and arouse men to reflect before it is too late! We priests must do at least what we can, or the blame will rest, in part at least, upon our own shoulders, according to the words of Holy Writ: "If, when I say to the wicked, Thou shalt surely die, thou declare it not to him nor speak to him, that he may be converted from his wicked way and live; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, *but I will require his blood at thy*

hand. But if thou give warning to the wicked, and he be not converted from his wickedness and from his evil way, he indeed shall die in his iniquity, *but thou hast delivered thy soul.*"*

* Ezek., iii, 18, 19.

VIII.

The Sovereign Seduction.

And man, poor insect of a summer's day
Dreams of eternal honors to his name,
Of endless glories and perennial bays.
He idly reasons of eternity
As of the train of ages,—when, alas!
Ten thousand of his centuries
Are, in comparison, a little point
Too trivial for accompt.

—H. Kirke White.

ONE of the great imperfections incidental to man's present state is the difficulty he experiences—I will not say in believing, for belief is natural to man—but in *realizing* anything beyond the present material world that surrounds him. Man will not readily subject himself to any severe strain; yet, without some resolute mental effort, he will hardly succeed in projecting his thoughts beyond the narrow barriers of time, to ponder over and apply the lessons of eternity.

He feels, indeed, that he is a responsible being. He is conscious of many obliga-

tions pressing upon him, and claiming attention. Nor is he without apprehension of a judgment to come. But, in spite of this, he scarcely adverts to the intimate connection that exists between even his most transitory daily thoughts, words and works, and the manifold and eternal consequences that flow directly from them. In theory, he is ready to admit that Time is the seed of Eternity, and that every waking hour is affecting, for weal or for woe, his endless future. Yet, in practice, he seems scarcely to notice this; and goes about his daily avocations, and carries on his ordinary routine of business, without any anxiety as to the purity of his motives, and unharassed by any special fear lest he should, by carelessness or inattention, interfere with God's plan and disturb the loving designs that his Sovereign Lord has upon him. In short, he rarely has any clear perception that he is actually—here and now—laying the foundations and building up the walls of that eternal abode, that "house not made with hands," which he will have to inhabit for evermore.

Upon so vital and so practical a point there should be no delusions; for eternity is not only the greatest of certainties, but it lies exceedingly near—yea, at our very doors,—being separated from us by only the slenderest partition. And, that shell-like barrier once broken through, we enter into a land of which no human being can form any adequate conception. We pass, as millions have passed before us, through the dread gates of Death, and at once we find ourselves in a totally different environment, with everything on an altered scale. We have outgrown time. Henceforth "Time itself shall be no more."* That mysterious entity that we measure by dials and clocks and revolutions of the earth, and by risings and settings of the sun; that Time which is so indissolubly bound up with our every thought and project, has melted quite away, and Eternity occupies its place. Time is found too cramped and limited to suit the requirements of an immortal spirit, now that it has escaped from its earthly bonds and grown to maturity.

* Apoc., x, 6.

We are in a new and permanent state, that can not be computed by years or centuries, and where all is fixed and changeless. Our very soul assumes a different rôle, and finds itself subject to different laws. In this life, sorrow and joy, pleasure and pain, laughter and tears, mingle and intermingle, because such things are all earthly and trivial. Not so in the land beyond the tomb. There the emotions and states of being are far too intense and all-pervading to allow opposite and contending passions to share the same breast. The joys and delights of the glorified soul are such as to fill and occupy its whole being. They lie upon it and cover it as a mighty flood, allowing no little island of sorrow or pain to appear throughout all its calm and measureless expanse. If pleasure be our portion, then pleasure, in all its myriad forms, will wholly absorb us; it will penetrate to every fibre of our being, and leave no rift or crevice for pain or agony to filter through. If, on the contrary, we stand condemned, then pain will take a like possession; it will fasten upon every faculty, and rack each

sense, and gnaw each limb with jarring agony, forbidding all approach of peace, all breath of happiness.

Our life here on earth is lived in the twilight,—a twilight made up of mingled beams from heaven and from hell. In eternity we shall know no twilight, but only the full brightness of a cloudless noonday, or else the utter darkness of a starless night; that is to say, either the day of supremest happiness, which men call heaven, or the deep night of quenchless woe, which they call hell. These are the two permanent states, and there is no other; so one of these must be ours when life at last is done. Which shall it be?

This question is interesting enough when considered in the abstract, or in its bearing upon our relatives and acquaintances, or upon the poor creature who died yesterday and whose body lies before us. But it is not till I begin to dissociate myself from the crowd, and to reflect that the choice between these two permanent states, so far as I am concerned, must be made *by me*, and made *soon*, that the consideration becomes of quite absorbing interest. That we—that is to say, that I

and you, gentle reader,—must throughout eternity be either supremely happy or supremely miserable is just as certain as that we must exist at all.

But the particular point so terrifying and so wholly overwhelming is that so very, very little (at least to our apprehension) is needed to determine our fate either in the one direction or in the other. An evil need not be certain nor even probable in order to inspire fear; it is enough that it be simply possible. For instance, the bare possibility of being rejected by God and cast into quenchless fires would, did one fully realize it, paralyze one with terror. Yet, so long as life lasts, that is, and must remain, a possibility, to be faced and recognized as a solemn and dreadful truth; for no man can ever fully trust himself, or say how he may act in future and unknown circumstances.* On the contrary, to trust oneself is to lean on a broken reed: it is he who thinks himself secure that is especially warned to take heed lest he fall. But if a

* Or even how he now stands. "Who can say, My heart is clean, I am pure from sin?" (Prov., xx, 9.)

man is foolhardy enough *wilfully to live in sin*, as thousands do, then what was before nothing more than a frightful possibility becomes a real probability. Such a one lives in actual danger of damnation, and will in all likelihood be damned; for, notwithstanding exceptions, the old rule holds: "As a man lives, so shall he die."

With the lurid glare of the quenchless fires on one side of us, and the vision of endless peace on the other, we can not afford to run any needless risk; nor dare we relax our vigilance for even one brief hour. When a traveller has to wend his way along a narrow ledge, amid deep caverns and yawning gulfs and bottomless precipices, a single false step may hurl him headlong to destruction. A sudden slip, a momentary loss of self-control, a slight giddiness, may mean a fall, a crash, an agonizing death. So is it with those who tread the narrow way to heaven. One false step, resulting in grievous sin, may precipitate the soul into the bottomless pit forever. Indeed, to say that this *may* happen is less than the truth. It *has* happened; it happens still, again and again, in myriad cases. We ourselves

may one day be examples of this truth. Nay, more: we shall be, without any doubt, unless we are resolved carefully and resolutely to keep sin far from us.

Fortunately, there is nothing on earth or in hell that can imperil our salvation except sin. All else is safe ground. Sin, and sin alone, has power to lay hold of the saintliest and to drag him down from the very threshold of heaven itself, and to fling him headlong. It is the one dreadful dragon, disputing our path and barring the entry into eternal life. Unless he be slain we can not "enter into the joy of the Lord." But here we shall be asked: Are all dangerous temptations and solicitations to sin equally to be feared and avoided? The answer is plain. Though we should fear all, yet some are to be feared far more than others. Hence prudence would suggest that our efforts should be directed chiefly and above all to those which are most dangerous, most widespread, and which experience proves to be most frequently fatal.

When we study the great black catalogue of sin, we note one which stands out blacker and deeper than all the rest;

one that seems to surpass and eclipse all others; one that can boast of more victims than any other, and that has driven more souls to hell, "the house of libertines." It is a sin which reaps a plentiful harvest wheresoever men and women are gathered together. Where other vices destroy their hundreds, this destroys its thousands. You know, dear reader, the sin to which I refer, and to which alone such words can apply; that sin which is more crafty and insidious it its approach, more blighting and desolating in its entry, and more calamitous and far-reaching in its effects, than any other; that terrible sin before which the mightiest quail and the strongest have been known to sink, and which withers up all whom it touches as the scorching winds of the African desert wither up flower and fruit. What is that sin? It is the sin from which the great Apostle St. Paul especially prayed to be delivered; the sin with which our Blessed Lord would never allow His name to be in any way connected;* that

* Of gluttony, of blasphemy, of sedition, of being possessed by the devil, and of many other things, He allowed men to accuse Him; but He would never permit any one to breathe a suspicion against His spotless purity.

sin which God hates with a particular hatred; the only sin, indeed, which wrung from His lips an expression of regret that He had ever made man—"It repenteth Me that I have made man,"*—and which broke open the fountains of the deep, and deluged the earth with water that rose and rose till it stood fifteen cubits above the highest mountain peaks,† and left the whole earth desolate, and every city a ruin. It is the sin of impurity, of lust, of unchastity; in a word, sins of the flesh.

Of all grave offences, this is the most prevalent. Apostolic men, missionaries, confessors, and directors—in fact, all priests experienced in working amongst and administering to souls,—agree that it is the commonest of all serious sins with which they have to deal.‡ St. Alphonsus, that great missionary, bishop, doctor, and saint, makes the terrifying avowal that it is his deliberate opinion more men and women are eternally lost through

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* Gen., vi, 7. † Ibid., vii, 20.

‡ Thus Father Luis de Granada, O. P., writes: "*Este es uno de los vicios mas generales, y mas cosarios y mas furiosos en acometer, que hay.*"

sins of the flesh, not only than through any other sin taken singly, but than through all other sins put together. In one remarkable passage in his Theology he expresses himself even yet more strongly) for he writes: *Non dubito asserere, ob hoc unum impudicitiæ vitium, aut saltem non sine eo, omnes damnari, quicumque damnantur.*—"I do not hesitate to affirm that all those who are lost are damned on account of sins of impurity, or, at all events, are not damned without them."*

Even physicians, who hear of such sins only in their most aggravated forms, declare that tens of thousands, especially among the youth of the country, ruin their constitution and undermine their strength by unlawful indulgence. Moreover, it is a crime which is found everywhere, in a greater or less degree. It attacks all classes, ranks, and professions, from the king upon his throne to the beggar in his lowly hovel.† Wisdom is powerless against it, as we may learn

* Theol. Moralis. De Sexto—monitum S. Alphonsi.

† Vincentur specie, qui non vincuntur prælio.

from the example of Solomon, who was the wisest of men and yet one of the most profligate. The strongest, unless God protect him, is in its presence as weak and yielding as a babe, as we may gather from the fall of Samson. Yea, even piety and holiness itself will wither away and shrink up before its pestilential breath, as a delicate flower before the scorching tropical sun,—unless, indeed, piety and holiness be guarded by great self-restraint and a careful avoidance of the occasions. This is proved by the appalling example of that holy king and prophet, David, "a man after God's own heart," whose soul was mortally wounded by an incautious glance at a forbidden object, which first stirred up the lustful desires of his heart, and then transformed him into an adulterer, as well as into a treacherous and most cold-blooded murderer.

The sin of impurity is a source of special danger; in the first place, because man's fallen nature is moved by an insatiable craving for sensual pleasures; in the second place, because he carries about with him all that is requisite for its indulgence; and, in the third place,

because the opportunity is seldom or never wanting. It is dangerous beyond all other sins, because so slight an indiscretion and so momentary a consent suffice to render the act or thought mortal. No outward deed need be done, no passing word need be spoken; a mere thought or wish, consciously entertained and wilfully dwelt upon, is enough to wrench asunder every rivet that binds the soul to God, and to set upon it the seal of damnation. Without stirring from his seat, or uttering a syllable, or moving a muscle, a man may harbor a thought which will hold him fast in hell forever. Christ preaching on the Mount said: "It was said to them of old, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say to you that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart."*

Although it is not easy to assign a satisfactory reason for it, yet all authorities seem to admit that there is a certain fascination about the temptation to impurity which can be predicated of no other. It finds within us an ally or

* St. Matt., v, 27, 28.

confederate ready to enter into negotiations with it; it strikes its roots in a congenial soil; it wins over the senses and lower powers of the soul almost before the intellect itself is fully aroused and aware of any danger. It throws a spell over the poor victim, and so engages and occupies his attention that he scarcely adverts to the gravity of the evil that is threatening him. Even the very punishments to which it is leading are too dimly seen to scare him from the commission of the crime. The mere contemplation of a forbidden object seems to fascinate the rash beholder, and to keep him spellbound, as a bird is held by the serpent, whose paralyzing look so holds its victim in bondage that it will use neither feet nor wings for flight, though both are free, but will draw nearer and nearer, up to the very jaws of its destroyer, till it is at last devoured.

That there is, in some sense, a stronger propension in our fallen nature toward this sin than toward any other, and a quicker response when the slightest occasion presents itself, seems clearly proved by the excessive care and watchfulness

that are enjoined by all spiritual writers, and the advice, repeated under so many forms, and by so many experienced directors, to avoid the occasion. The observations of the late Dr. William G. Ward, in this connection, are particularly to the point, and deserving of consideration. On p. 389 of his "Nature and Grace" he writes:

"The propension of the flesh differs in various and most important respects from all others. A very little consideration will sufficiently show this. Suppose it is a fast-day: who ever heard of the notion that the mere *sight* of meat, much more that the mere *reading* about it, is so proximate an occasion of sin as to be in itself mortal? Or (to avoid objections which may be raised against this particular instance) suppose I were a Cistercian, and meat were always unlawful to me: who, in such a case, ever heard of a notion like that above imagined? Yet, in matters of *impurity*, we all know the frightful peril involved in allowing ourselves to gaze on evil objects, or even to read about them.

"Or let me suppose the case of a Christian who was once in the habit of stealing, and by help of his thefts leading a comfortable and luxurious life, but who has now reformed and belongs to some strict Order. Who ever heard that the *contemplation* of wealth—the mere *looking* at fine equipages, grand appointments, and handsome houses—produces the almost inevitable effect of reviving the passion 'delectatio' in regard to the old mortal sin? Yet, in the matter of impurity, such would be the case. Nay, take that very propension which, of all, is far the nearest to the one which we are considering,—take the desire of *revenge* as it exists in an Italian or Spaniard. To a revengeful man, even when reformed, the sight of his enemy might doubtless be a great occasion of sin; but surely no one will deny that such a man may read the accounts of murders *in general*, and may enter, too, into every detail and particular of some individual murder where the parties concerned are quite unknown to him,—without so much as a passing temptation to his old sin. How totally opposite is our nature in regard to

impurity! Spiritual writers universally recognize this fact. As one instance of such recognition, they will never *permit* any such detailed consideration of past sins under this head, as they *most earnestly recommend* in regard to all *other* sins of whatever kind."*

Still less will they allow any liberty of the eyes to gaze upon, or to the ears to listen to, what might arouse sinful desires. In no other sin is the connection between the occasion and the fall so close as in sins of the flesh. Any license is dangerous and liable to be fraught with the most fatal consequences. To tamper with evil occasions is like playing with fire—almost always hazardous. The temptation, even though slight at first, has a way of suddenly developing, and enveloping the unhappy victim almost without warning.† To imagine, as some do, that they may approach quite close and yet not be engulfed, is one of the commonest delusions

* The italics are all Dr. Ward's.

† "*Es este fuego de tan incontrastable fuerza que no hay quien pueda resistirle,*" says De Lanuza, Bishop of Barbastro. ("Discursos," vol. v, p. 233.)

that the devil makes use of to ensnare them. Such a one is too often punished for his presumption by a terrible fall. He resembles a swimmer who should draw near some treacherous whirlpool, and essay how closely he could approach it without being drawn in. So soon as he draws nearer, he feels the force of the rushing waters becoming stronger and stronger, till at last, aroused to a sense of his position, he prepares, when too late, to quit the danger. Too late, indeed! For now his strength proves unequal to the effort, and he is borne along by the impetuous current, whirled round and round for a moment or two, and finally sucked down below, never to be heard of again.

Or we may compare such culpable imprudence to that of the moth circulating round a candle. It is attracted by the brilliancy of the flame, and urged on by a strong curiosity to approach nearer. It becomes less cautious; and, though it may escape destruction for a short time, full soon it is lapped up by the flickering tongue of fire, and perishes miserably.

In times of peace it is natural for man to overestimate his strength and to imagine himself a hero; it is only by actual experience, and under the pressure of strong temptation, that his weakness is made manifest. This is so specially true of the vice of impurity that no one but the most presumptuous and quixotic would be foolhardy enough to run any risk. In the absence of the lascivious object, one feels a strength and a sense of security which is extremely gratifying to one's self-love, but which is liable to be very rudely shaken when the hour of trial is really at hand. Experience proves that even the sturdiest and the most resolute easily deceive themselves. If they do not misjudge their own powers, they are apt greatly to underestimate the seductive force and disconcerting energy and impetuosity of their enemy, before which all their fine resolutions dissolve like mist before the sun.

What is stronger or harder, what is more stubborn and unbending, than highly tempered steel? With that, men break through rocks and excavate mountains; yet its strength disappears and

turns to weakness when it is confronted with the fire. Thrust a bar of the most rigid steel into the blazing heat of a furnace. Will it still remain rigid? No! See! It is all undone. It bends and yields like softest wax, and drops away in liquid weakness before so fierce a heat.

So it is with the soul of man wilfully exposing himself to the fires of impurity. God will, no doubt, protect His faithful children amid even the fiercest flames, as He protected the three children in the Babylonian furnace, "seven times heated"; but this He will do on one condition: only if, like Sidrach, Misach, and Abdenago, they are thrust in by the hands of others (or by unforeseen or unavoidable circumstances); not if it be through any wilful imprudence or curiosity of their own. Deliberately to court the danger is to invite a fall.

We must never forget that to be exposed to temptations which are not of our own choosing, and which are sprung upon us unexpectedly and against our will, is one thing; while wilfully to go into the danger ourselves, without sufficient cause, is quite another. In the first case, we may

reckon with absolute certainty upon God to rescue us if we are faithful to grace; but in the second case we can have no such grounds for confidence: quite the contrary; for we are expressly warned that "to love the danger is to perish in it."* Other vices we may face boldly and fight; in this vice our only safety is in flight.† *Nemo mortalium juxta viperam securos somnos capit.*—"No mortal can safely lie down to sleep beside a viper," observes St. Jerome. This is an important warning, which a sad and long experience proves to be much needed; though, unfortunately, but little heeded.

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* Ecclus., iii, 27.

† This truth is forcibly put by Bp. G. Bautista de Lanuza, who writes: "El Apóstol Santiago dá por remedio contra Satanás hacerlo rostro y resistirle: *Resistite diabolo et fugiet a vobis.* (Jam., iv, 7.) El mismo consejo nos dió el Apóstol san Pedro. (I. Pet., v, 9.) Mas, cuando habla de la lascivia, no dice '*Resistite,*' sino '*Fugite.*' *Fugite fornicationem.* (I. Cor., vi, 18.) Conocía el santo Apóstol que los otros vicios pueden vencerse resistiendo, pero que sola la fuga podía ser nuestro preservativo y remeio en este."—"Discursos," vol. v, pp. 262, 3.

Another circumstance which renders temptations to this ignominious and shameful vice so peculiarly difficult to avoid is the fact that they may arise from so great a variety of sources,—from pictures, statuary, papers and books, songs, plays, representations, and many other things, as well as from persons. They may enter through the eyes and the ears and the other senses. The gruesome hours of the night are as favorable to the tempter as the gladsome hours of the day; and, strange to say, though youth is the special period of the disorders which we have been considering, mature age and even senility are by no means entirely free from them.

But of all sources of danger the chief is a bad and corrupt companion. When once it has been our misfortune to make such an acquaintance, there is nothing to be done but get rid of him, without delay, and at any cost. However pleasant and even necessary such a person (I can not call him a *friend*) may be; however closely bound up with our present happiness, and however dear and indispensable, we must steel our hearts, and resolutely determine to break

through the ties that bind us to him. He may appear to be as necessary to us as our right arm or our right eye. It matters not: the command has gone forth: "If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. . . . If thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee." And why? Because we must be prepared to make any sacrifice rather than jeopardize our eternal salvation; or, in the words of the inspired writer, because "it is better for thee that one of thy members should perish than that thy whole body should be cast into hell."*

That this advice is unquestionably sound, and that our undoubted duty is to follow it, is clear; for it emanates from no less an authority than the Holy Spirit of God. But, alas! even the soundest advice is difficult enough to put in practice if, as in the present instance, it does not fall in with our inclinations. But what renders the counsel of the Holy Spirit so particularly hard to men and women of the world is just the very attitude taken up by the world itself. If all were agreed and united in condemning lust and impurity,

* St. Matt., v, 29, 30.

even in thought; if there were a strong and pronounced public opinion denouncing all that savors of sensuality, our struggle with corrupt nature would be enormously strengthened and assisted. We should then be swimming in the midst of a strong stream, flowing in the right direction. Its rapid current would support us, and bear us along, almost in spite of ourselves, and our victories would be all practically assured. But, unhappily, this is not the case; nay, the whole current is against us, and we are compelled to offer it a stout resistance at every step. The world does not judge as God does. It measures the gravity of crimes by quite other standards. It jests lightly about acts of impurity, and treats as pardonable weaknesses and mere peccadilloes and indiscretions what God Himself condemns as the worst of crimes and as a species of idolatry. "No fornicator nor unclean nor covetous person, which is a *serving of idols*, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."*

The fact is, the world is seated in darkness, and knows nothing of the enormity

* Ephes., v. 5.

of any sin that is not an offence against itself; least of all does it understand sins of the flesh. It finds a thousand excuses for them, and dismisses the worst excesses as acts of mere human frailty. It does more: it would persuade us that virginal purity is not merely difficult, but unattainable, and beyond the reach of human nature. It exonerates even the worst offenders, and calmly assures us that men who fall have fallen, not because they are wicked, but because they are weak; not because they are disobedient and rebellious, but because they could not have done otherwise; and that we must excuse them, since "no man is bound to what is impossible."

This infamous doctrine is put forward and emphasized again and again with the most lamentable results. It is one of the worst falsehoods that has ever issued from the Father of Lies, since it leads to two terrible consequences. In the first place, it robs the sinner of all sense of guilt; for no one can be held responsible for what he really can not help; and in the second place, it leads him to discouragement and despair. For what is the

use of fighting against an invincible foe? Why attempt to resist the irresistible? Why struggle and strive and labor when disaster and defeat can be the only possible issue? Once the premise is admitted, the consequences must be admitted too, since they logically follow. But the premise itself is absolutely false.

It is true, of course, that *unassisted* nature is powerless before so insidious a foe. It is true that man, when left to himself, is weak and wavering and easily overcome—a mere reed bending before the hurricane,—and so destitute of all moral courage that he must fall miserably. Theologians not only tell us that we can not overcome, but they go so far as to declare that we can not, *of ourselves*, even engage in battle or offer any resistance to our adversaries.*

Then is the world's view correct, after all? Is our case really so desperate? And is God asking us to do what He knows surpasses our capabilities? No. The

* In hoc agone cum laboramus, Deum habemus adjutorem; si enim nos Ipse non adjuvat, non dico vincere, sed non pugnare poterimus.—S. Aug.: Serm. clvi.

answer to this apparent difficulty is simple enough. If God says, "Without Me you can do nothing," He is careful to remind us, at the same time, that "with Him we can do all things." The fact is, we are never alone, never abandoned by God. He puts Himself at our service; He is ever ready to come to our succor; and, so far from its being true that we are at the mercy of the temprer, we are absolutely invulnerable and certain of victory if only we have recourse to God by prayer, and correspond with the grace He gives us.

There is nothing so clearly laid down in the Holy Scriptures as this most consoling truth: "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."* "He hath regard to the prayer of the humble, and He hath not despised their petition."† "Who," asks Ecclesiasticus (iii, 12), "hath called upon Him and been despised by Him? For God is compassionate and merciful, and a protector to all who seek Him in truth." "I will call upon the Lord," said holy David, "and I shall be saved from my enemies. . . .The

* Rom., x, 13. † Ps. ci, 18.

cords of hell compassed me, the snares of death prevented me. In my distress, I will call upon the Lord, and He will hear my voice."* The most violent and fierce temptations may be overcome by the grace derived from God in prayer; yea, though they approach us with all the seductiveness and cunning attributed to the asp and the basilisk, or with all the fury and rage of the lion and the dragon, it matters not; for in either case we have the explicit promise of victory. "Thou shalt walk upon the asp and the basilisk, and thou shalt trample under foot the lion and the dragon. . . . He shall cry to Me, and I will hear him; I am with him in tribulation. I will deliver him and I will glorify him."†

The danger of these temptations is admittedly great; yes, exceedingly great. But, remember, the danger arises solely from our own turpitude and cowardice. Provided we honestly *wish* to conquer, and are willing to make use of the means of victory, we have nothing whatever to fear; for if God be with us, who shall be against us? Indeed we may cry out,

* II. Kings, xxii, 6, 7.

† Ps. xc, 13-15

as confidently as David himself: "Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils; for Thou, O Lord, art with me."*

If history is full of examples of the fall of the strong who trusted in their own strength, it is no less full of examples of the triumph of the weak who trusted in God alone. Who can read, for instance, the stirring accounts of such mere children, as St. Cecilia and St. Agnes in modern chronicles, or of the chaste Susanna† and the unconquerable Joseph,‡ as told in the Holy Scriptures, without realizing the supernatural power of divine grace, and the consequent security of such as put their trust in God? Nor is it necessary to hark back to olden days. What experienced priest is there, now living, who has not again and again met with cases, among his own flock, that have made him pause and marvel at the power of God's protecting care,—cases of young and passionate natures, who have found themselves amid such dangerous surroundings, and in such equivocal positions, that, humanly speaking, they *must* have fallen,

* Ps. xxii, 4. † Dan., xiii. ‡ Gen., xxxix.

yet who have stood firm and unbending before the storm!

The miracle of the three children in the fiery furnace, seven times heated, has been, and is being, re-enacted in every age and in every country of the Christian world, though in these latter instances the flames have been the flames of concupiscence; the furnace, the furnace of worldly temptations. We have ourselves met, in great factory towns and in the congested districts of the metropolis, pure and unsullied souls, who, notwithstanding exceptionally trying and difficult surroundings, have retained their innocence and purity, in a way calculated to fill the believer with inexpressible wonder and delight, and whose cases, if known, would stagger and puzzle any scoffer who denies the possibility of Christian virtue.

The simple fact is, none but those who have witnessed and experienced it can so much as suspect the irresistible efficacy of earnest, humble prayer, the marvellous power of the sacraments worthily received, and the graces that flow from the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass devoutly and frequently heard. Some may make light

of such divinely constituted means of perseverance; but he who deliberately doubts on such a point has already, in a sense, lost his faith. For are we not bound to believe that God is infinitely good in Himself; that He loves the creatures He has made; that He can not help loving them and wishing them well; that their fall—if they do fall—must be, not for want of His help, but in spite of it? Does not the Church teach that He loves us incomparably more than it is possible to imagine or conceive,—yea, that His love is so excessive and so measureless that He gave up His own Son and delivered Him to death, even to the ignominious death of the Cross, that we might not perish everlastingly?

Then no matter what may be our natural weakness on the one hand, or the violence of temptation on the other, how can we doubt? To speak as worldlings speak is an outrage against God, and deserving of the severest censure. In putting forward their mischievous theories in excuse of sensuality and immorality, they do but prove that they know nothing of the

tenderness and the loving solicitude of their 'Father who is in heaven.'

"It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."* "I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee."† "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will I not forget thee."‡ "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of My eye."§ Do not these and a hundred other texts contain more than a promise of protection to all who are in tribulation? Not a hair of our heads shall be touched, not a stain or blemish shall disfigure the beauty of our souls, so long as we invoke the aid of the King of battles, and are prepared to co-operate with His comforting grace, which is measured out according to the violence of the temptation and to the greatness of our need. After all, there is only one thing wholly and utterly impossible to God, and that is that He should abandon a soul that puts its trust in Him and prove unfaithful to His promises.

* St. Matt., xviii, 14.
† Heb., xiii, 5.
‡ Is., xlix, 15
§ Zach., ii, 8.

In Te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in æternum.—"In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped; I shall not be confounded forever."